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I REMEMBER MAMA

It was with mixed feelings of appreciation, wonderment, sadness, and remorse that I read and re-read the tribute to my mother, Esther Singer Kreitman ["The Trammeled Talent of Isaac Bashevis Singer's Neglected Sister," Spring 1991].

The posthumous glory saddens me. I wish I could believe in an after-life replete with awareness of happenings on earth.

My browsing in LILITH has been an enlightening experience, and I was especially moved by Masha Leon's interview with Israeli author and actress Gila Almagor [Spring 1991].

Maurice Carr
Tel Aviv

WHICH WOMAN WROTE 'THE BOOK OF J'?

I liked Adrien Bledstein's response to *The Book of J* ["A Feminist Responds to *The Book of J*," Summer 1991], a surprising book to have achieved bestsellerdom. Ms. Bledstein's sentiment that *J* may have been Absalom's sister Tamar is

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interesting, given that Tamar apparently never married and may indeed have pursued a scribal career. I wish Bledstein had elaborated why she thinks *J* (like Tamar) suffered from family incest. If anything, the *J* author promoted the idea of family incest as indicative of the Divine Couple—Abraham and Sarah being not only husband and wife, but also brother and sister, maybe even God and Goddess (at Elephantine, Yahweh and Anath). Josephus gives ambiguous passages that indicate Tamar and Absalom may have been lovers: they lived together, and Absalom 's daughter was named Tamar. The *J* author may have known incest, but in an environment quite different from ours, so that we cannot purport to understand Tamar's (or Sarah's) experience with incest.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson
Seattle, WA

[Some scholarship indicates that it was a matter of status to be called not only "husband" and "wife" when you married, but also "brother" and "sister." Inheritance laws were also a factor behind this taxonomy: If a woman was legally barred from inheritance, marrying a man who also became her "brother," reenfranchised her vicariously.—Ed]

While I find Adrien Janis Bledstein's proposal of Tamar, David's daughter, as the author *J* as fanciful and as full of romantic fiction as Harold Bloom's depiction of *J*, I would like to respond to Bledstein's assertion that Bloom "tweak[ed] the noses of biblical scholars…[and] tease[d] feminists" with his explication. He created a *J* "irreverent in her depiction of Yahweh, her deity is an imp—something like you yourself," Harold Bloom ["A Feminist Responds to the *Book of J*," Summer 1991].

Bloom is the author of the extremely influential and quite brilliant *Anxiety of Influence* (1973), in which he posits a theory of poetic composition based on Freud's Oedipal conflict. His exciting theory, however, presupposes the poet is male, for which he has been taken to task by feminist literary theorists.

Among these, Annette Kolodny concludes that when applied to women, "Bloom's paradigm of poetic history… proves useful only in a negative sense: for, by omitting the possibility of poet-mothers from his psychodynamic of literary influence (allowing the feminine only the role of Muse—as composite whore and mother), Bloom effectively masks the fact of an other tradition entirely—that in which women taught one another how to read and write about and out of their own unique (and sometimes isolated) contexts" ("A Map for Rereading; or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," in *The (M)other Tongue*, Cornell University Press, 1985).

Bloom's *J* theory just doesn't ring true coming from the creator of the "anxiety of influence" theory. It strikes me that Bloom, in an attempt, both impish and irreverent as Bledstein notes, to justify himself with or revenge himself against feminists, created a theory of authorship which perversely responded to such assertions as Kolodny's.

Dolores D. Pellman
New York, NY

SEARCHING, FROM DOWN UNDER

I read a letter in the Winter 1991 issue of LILITH from a woman in the USSR who was trying to trace relatives she hadn't heard from for ten years. I have a similar problem, but my relatives have not been heard of for about 70 years.

My grandfather, Shimon Louis Hasman, whose name was anglicized from Chasman, emigrated from Vilna to Leeds, England, which is where I was born. He had an older brother, who spelled his surname "Kasman" and settled in Los Angeles. They corresponded for some time, but lost touch before 1918.

All four of my grandparents left brothers and sisters in Vilna and Kovno, but we know of no survivors. Some years ago, when my parents had a very brief stopover in Los Angeles on their way to England, my father looked in a telephone book and found a Kasman listed. He got as far as picking up the phone, then lost his nerve, not knowing what to say. I understand his hesitation, but am very sad that he wasn't able to find out if this Kasman was related to us.

I would like to try to trace all four family names, and I am contacting any agencies of which I hear. Family names from Vilna are Hasman (Chasman, Kasman) and Glass (Glasz), and from Kovno, Segal and Schrednitsky.

I enjoy everything in LILITH but particularly the writing of immigrant women from Europe (which feels like a link, however tenuous, with my missing relatives).

Rebekah Hasman-Judd
Hamilton, New Zealand

WOMEN'S PRAYER CIRCLES

Recently, I joined a Jewish "womyn's" prayer group—our first meeting was the day before Rosh HaShanah. There, sitting in a circle in the woods, with the help of a woman rabbi, we welcomed to our circle the spirits of our female ancestors by speaking their names. I am Nancy, the daughter of Muriel, the daughter of Rose, the daughter of Rhoda. We sat within a circle of red cord like the cord that is wrapped around the Biblical Rachel's tomb near Jerusalem. We performed rituals, made prayers for each other, cried together, sang together, and

(continued on page 32)

FROM THE EDITOR

Findings from the National Jewish Population Survey, released by the Council of Jewish Federations and the City University of New York Graduate Center, show that Jewish women are the best educated women in America today. Reinforcing what we learned from LILITH's reader survey of a year ago, the national survey notes that nearly two-thirds of American Jewish women between 24 and 45 have college degrees, compared to only 18% of all white American women. The coordinator of the NJPS calls the distinctiveness of Jewish women "the real surprise in the survey."

Our distinctiveness makes us vulnerable as well as unique. We *are* different in significant ways from women of other ethnic or religious groups, and not just by virtue of our college degrees, our relative affluence or our liberal politics (all revealed in the NJPS).

LILITH's readers demonstrate many aspects of this distinctiveness: on the average, you read more than forty books a year; you are likely to be married *and* working *and* volunteering. Jewish culture stresses education and accomplishment, but delivers to its daughters an equally powerful message about the primacy of marriage and procreation. This double message can be enriching and empowering, but it also causes many of us to feel that at every moment we should be doing something else. The cultural tropisms toward marriage and family life on the one hand, and toward education and "making something of yourself" on the other, cause many Jewish women to feel pulled by conflicting forces, and has led to hostility between women who have made what appear to be divergent choices.

Over the next several issues, LILITH will look at some of the implications of our reader survey and of the NJPS. Some examples: exploring the hostilities in Jewish philanthropic circles between Jewish women who work for pay and those who are "professional volunteers" in the Jewish community (and why these particular conflicts don't exist for men); shedding light on extraordinary new ideas in Jewish education that will affect women, girls, and the Jewish future; highlighting Sephardic women, a project made possible by a generous grant from the Maurice Amado Foundation; and investigating whether there are common characteristics to *in*marriages—the new minority of marriages in which a born Jew marries another Jew.

The new survey data convince us that the majority of Jewish women in North America are like LILITH's readers so we assume that the thousands of potential subscribers out there who do not yet read LILITH have only one reason: they've never been given the opportunity. You can help expand the LILITH dialogue to others. Reach out to your colleagues, friends, relatives, dorm-mates, neighbors, Elderhostel companions, dinner hosts and others with a gift subscription to LILITH. A subscription form is bound into the magazine; if yours is missing, please call us at (212) 757-0818. And please let us know your opinions both on the contents of this issue and on topics you'd like to see covered in the future.

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HOLTZMAN: INVESTING WITH A CONSCIENCE

NYC COMPTROLLER ON ISRAEL AND WOMEN

The track record of New York City Comptroller Elizabeth Holtzman who plans to run for the U.S. Senate this fall, clearly indicates that she does her investing with a social conscience, and with particular concern for the interests both of the Jewish community and of women.

In what she called a "rock solid investment," Holtzman, a trustee and chief investment advisor for the New York City Employees Retirement System (NYCERS), announced in April 1991 the purchase of $12 million in Federally guaranteed bonds to finance the construction of new housing for Soviet Jewish immigrants in Israel. NYCERS provides pensions to all NYC employees, except for teachers, firefighters, and police officers.

She said, "With this purchase we are participating with the people of Israel in building housing for Soviet Jewish immigrants and making a sound investment on behalf of the participants in the pension fund."

Holtzman travelled to Israel in July 1991 to build a working relationship with the Israeli government, in order to more effectively fight the Arab boycott. The Israeli government agreed to provide information on American companies suspected of actively participating in the boycot, and Holtzman promised to use that information to conduct further investigations of those companies and to promote direct action against them, if necessary.

Her visit occurred in the aftermath of the case against the Baxter International pharmaceutical company, whose 1988 sale of a plant in Israel suspiciously coincided with its undertaking of a joint venture with the Syrian Defense Ministry. The American Jewish Congress provided Holtzman with documentation proving that Baxter had illegally agreed to avoid opening future plants in Israel and to sell its investments in Israel, in order to be removed from the Arab blacklist.

By introducing a NYCERS shareholders' resolution demanding full disclosure from Baxter, Holtzman put tremendous pressure on the company. While Baxter representatives continued to claim that they had broken no laws and refused to make the information public, the controversy finally forced Baxter to concede they would not build the Syrian plant.

In September 1990 Holtzman opposed the Dayton Hudson Corporation's decision to withdraw funding from Planned Parenthood. NYCERS owns over 600,000 shares of the company' stock, making it the 22nd-largest institutional investor. As a result of pressure from shareholders, among others, Dayton Hudson eventually restored funding to Planned Parenthood.

Yet sometimes even the best intentions fall short of action. In early 1990, when AT&T withdrew its funding from Planned Parenthood, Holtzman's NYCERS backed a resolution calling on AT&T to restore funding for Planned Parenthood's teen pregnancy prevention efforts. Holtzman threatened to withdraw New York City pension funds (one-tenth of one percent of the company's shares) from AT&T if the money were not reinstated to Planned Parenthood. However, although AT&T did not yield to shareholder pressure, NYCERS nevertheless held onto its shares of AT&T. A spokeswoman for Ms. Holtzman explained that because the NYCERS fund is so immense, it is difficult to move investments. In fact, the fund has divested only once in recent memory—from South Africa.

—Lauren Golden

BUILDING ON JEWISH VALUES

TEENAGERS PUT TZEDAKAH TO WORK

Over the past 41 summers, the American Jewish Society for Service (AJSS), in conjunction with local service groups, has conducted 94 volunteer work service projects in 40 states, training high school juniors and seniors (mostly Jewish) in the arts of restoration, renovation, co-operation, and understanding, and sending them to communities that need their help. Projects generally require participants to engage in the construction or repair of homes, classrooms, overnight shelters, community centers, or other properties. The agenda for the summer of 1991 included rehabilitation of deteriorated buildings on the south side of Chicago, the creation of temporary housing for the homeless in Everett, Washington, and renovation of single family homes for the working poor in Topeka, Kansas.

The AJSS brochure states, "Many young people have a dream; it is a precious vision of being able to accomplish, through their own efforts, the betterment of the life of their fellow human beings…AJSS, through the years, has been dedicated to making the dream a reality."

Rebecca Gallin of Manhattan, now in her first year at Carlton College, participated in the AJSS program in 1990. "Instead of giving money, which is the regular form of tzedakah, we actually went out and made an important impact on the community," she noted. "It was good for the Jewish community, because the people actually saw us helping them. Many of them were meeting Jews for the first time, and we were dismissing the bad preconceptions they had."

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means pay $1000 (part of the actual cost of running the program) to participate in this unique seven-week program. Scholarships are available for those who cannot pay. Regardless of their back-ground, students are accepted on the basis of their general desire to perform a service and to fulfill the mission of AJSS: "To make real the Jewish ideals of justice, one God, and one humanity."

The program does not coddle or pamper its campers. Students are required to perform physical labor five days a week, and the AJSS brochure cautions future applicants that individualism and personal preferences must at times be subordinated to the requirements of the group.

For further information, contact: American Jewish Society for Service, Room 1304, 15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010.

—Lauren Golden

RITA FALBEL SINGING THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE

In her second album, Rita Falbel sings the multi-faceted music of the Jewish experience in the Diaspora. *Timepieces, Between Jewish Past and Future*, released in July 1991 (Global Village Music), features three original compositions and traditional folk songs, in Hebrew, Ladino, Yiddish, Arabic, Spanish, German and English. Falbel's music follows the wanderings of the Jewish people, examining what is gained and lost in assimilation and acculturation. Songs range from "Shterndl," poet Moyshe Kulbak's Yiddish memories of shtetl life, to "Sarika," a Ladino folk song from the Balkan Sephardic tradition, to "September Song," Kurt Weill's ballad reflecting his own assimilation into the New York theatrical culture.

"Singing for as long as I can remember," she recalls, "I learned from my mother my first songs—the German Lieder of Schubert and Mozart." She says her voice is a gift that was enhanced through training, which she received from the Vienna Academy of Music.

Something of a wanderer herself, Falbel was born in Vienna and immigrated as a child with her parents to New York City, where she has spent most of her life. Yet, she says, "I don't have a sense of belonging to a particular place except when the light in some places in Israel seems to evoke deep memory."

When she isn't singing, Falbel is engaged in activist projects for women and peace. She is an editor of BRIDGES Magazine, a Jewish-feminist journal, and she serves on the coordinating committee of the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Falbel is also co-editor of Jewish Women's Call for Peace: A Handbook for Jewish Women on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. She has performed for audiences throughout the U.S., including New Haven, Berkeley, and New York. Her first album is entitled *Hitchin' Rides.*

—Lainie Blum-Cogan

COMPUTER SHIVA-CALL ON-LINE FRIENDSHIPS, FOUND AND LOST

We have entered an age not only of computerized Talmud study, but of electronic "*shiva* calls" for study partners whose love we know only on-line.

When Reconstruc-tionist Rabbi Daniel Kamesar, a regional director of Mazon [the Jewish anti-hunger organization], suffered a fatal heart attack in the North Philadelphia Amtrak station, the news went out in the Jewish section of the WELL, a computer bulletin board:

"He was 35 years old," posted Rabbi Michael Plotnick (log-on name: Zola) from Bordentown, New Jersey. "He is survived by Cynthia, his wife, and their three children, Nathan, Sophia and Henya." Plotnick went on to eulogize Daniel, and to solicit *tzedakah* (charity) for the children.

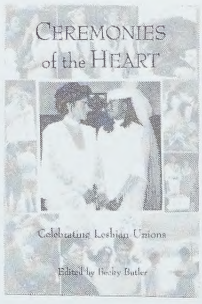
Kamesar had started an on-line computer study-group of the Talmud (tractate *Baba Metzia*) in the WELL, and the study partners, who for the most part know each other only electronically, had developed close and supportive relationships on-screen.

The next day, an on-line *shiva*-call grapevine took root.

"I'm in a little shock right now. There's a certain bond that happens when two people study hard together. They share a soul for a little while," posted David Cooper (log-on name: Dayac), a para-rabbi from Berkeley, California. "Scrod [Kamesar's log-on name] and I really entered each other's study space and part of him became part of me. This is the first intimate on-line friend I ever had who died. I miss his presence in a way that I have never experienced before. I sensed such a wonderful goodness about him during the several thousand words we exchanged. That's all I can say right now. Just that if someone on-line could feel such goodness, *kal va-chomer* [how much more so] for those who knew him in person. Their loss must be indescribable."

Another electronic friend quickly added: "May the Source of Being bring comfort."

—Susan Schnur



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SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

The Clarence Thomas Supreme Court nomination hearings forced millions of Americans to confront their own behavior—and their own victimization—in the workplace.

Women professionals in Jewish organizations who faced blatant sexual coercion by male superiors called the *Atlanta Jewish Times*, LILITH and doubtless other pubications, too, with their stories, but then quickly pleaded that their stories not be used, or that extreme steps be taken to conceal their identities.

"It's too scary to talk about," said a female official with a major Jewish group, who did not want to be identified. "I have been discussing this with women in my agency, and we all have stories to tell. But we won't; it's too dangerous. Maybe we're contributing to the problem by not talking about it. But we have careers to worry about."

Jewish organizations, said Gary Rubin, director of national affairs for the American Jewish Committee, provide particularly fertile soil for the wide range of behaviors that add up to sexual harassment.

"We not only have worker-supervisor relationships, but we have lay-professional relationships," he said. "There are many different subordinate-supervisor relationships, which offer the possibility of power being used for sexual harassment."

He continued, "That isn't about sex, it's about power. The structure of this community tends to increase the possibility for that kind of behavior, because so many men are in dominant positions."

Diana Aviv, associate executive vice chair of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), noted that part of the problem is that the leadership network, both lay and professional, is intertwined. "The leaders of one organization will sit on the board of others. Opportunities for professional growth can be shut off by vindictive leaders. So there is a strong disincentive to speak up, because it will hurt careers."

Sexual harassment exists in all levels of Jewish institutions and organizations. Even rabbinical seminaries are not immune from sexual harassment—an increasingly common topic of conversation when women rabbis meet with each other in private.

"It happens," said a Jewish woman familiar with life in the seminaries. "It involves a very small proportion of the teachers. But the fact that it happens at all is deeply disturbing to the women who are its victims. When it happens in the religious environment, it is perhaps even more damaging because these people are supposed to know better."

In order to bring the Jewish community's values more in line with behavior in the workplace, formal mechanisms have to be developed within the community to make it easier and more comfortable for women to pursue charges of harassment, according to several leaders.

More fundamentally, the underlying male dominance of the Jewish community needs to be altered. They suggested that until the Jewish community makes a concerted effort to seek out qualified, talented women for leadership positions, sexual harassment will continue to be a problem.

Excerpted from "The Anita Hill Syndrome in the Jewish World," by James Besser in the Nov. 22nd issue of the Atlanta Jewish Times.

Diana Aviv and Gary Rubin, in an article from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, call for action on these fronts.

- A campaign by communal leaders to educate the community about the problem and take a strong stand against abuse.
- The creation of objective mechanisms within our agencies by which women who have suffered harassment can lodge complaints without fear of ridicule or threats to career development.
- Swift action against anyone found to engage in sexual harassment. Any person found to be guilty should be deemed ineligible for communal leadership.
- A systematic campaign to ensure the advancement of women to the most senior levels of lay and professional leadership of organizations, to correct the structural imbalances that feed this problem.
- Board training and personnel practices that seek to enhance teamwork and understanding between men and women so that Jewish organizations become models for constructive relationships rather than sites of exploitation.
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(continued on page 33)

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PURIM

by Susan Charles Groth

When few could distinguish
Mordecai from Haman
(and the two gentlemen, themselves,
were passed out, arm in arm,
under the King's throne),
Esther tied King Ahashverosh
to the horse's royal tail
and dragged him through Persian streets
to the graveyard. There she swapped him
for his dead Queen and these two
cantered back to the palace,
where Vashti danced a wild tarantella
and stripped off her funeral shroud.
While the noblemen gaped and gangled
at the reawakened beauty,
Esther raced through the feast,
nailing each tongue to the table,
still flapping.
And she flaunted her Jewishness,
despite her drunken cousin,
and canted bentchlicht
for all the Jewish mothers,
while balancing Haman's hat
on the King's gold sceptre.
Then, the two ladies painted
on the soles of their sandals
and hopscotched
'til they had stamped out
the names of Ahashverosh, and Mordecai,
and all those
who would have women
bury their souls in flesh.

Susan Charles Groth lives in Lambertville, NJ and runs poetry workshops in a home for the Jewish aged.

HIS ARMY HER ARMY

Women in the Israeli Military

by Gail Hareven

Basic Training wasn't that bad after all. Most of the time was passed in relative ease in what was officially termed "guard duty over my room." I read books and developed quite nicely. Even today there are rainy mornings when I yearn for a commanding officer who would order me to remain in my room and guard it.

As time passed I began to understand why the army desired that we—the women soldiers of today—should feel as if we each personally carried on the torch (and the aura) of the pioneering female soldiers of the 1948 War of Independence: it was all supposed to make us feel that we were doing the "real thing." The "real thing," of course, being whatever the men were doing. Our Basic Training was planned as a diluted version of the male experience, providing us with knowledge irrelevant to what military service actually loomed in our futures.

Those of us with adventurous tendencies treated the entire Basic Training affair as one long summer camp which unfortunately lacked men. Others simply learned to suffer the idiocy. It is quite possible that this acceptance of idiocy is the true and ultimate goal of every Basic Training.

Toward the end of the month, we were marched to the cinema on our base to be refreshed with a fashion show and to listen to the Chief Officer of the I.D.F. Women's Corps. Models dressed in civilian garb pranced gracefully about the stage, admonishing us to preserve our femininity. We sat before them in our hideous dress uniforms, thrilled by the artistic event which awakened our dormant femininity.

Our uniforms resembled the results of one of the Israeli government's coalition agreements. Clearly their designers had struggled with the issue of whether their patriotism demanded the exposure of the curvaceousness of our Jewish women soldier bodies or whether their national obligation was rather to hide them from the covetous eyes of our enemies. The solution was a creative one. It entailed exposing the Jewish women soldier's body, but doing so at its ugliest. Itchy pants which clung tightly to the most unmentionable of places, busty blouses bursting at the chest, orthopedic shoes with their geriatric laces and a cap like a rhino's horn protruding from our heads—this was our Women's Corps gear.

"Attention!" We became attentive. Towards the stage comes striding our supreme commandress, the Chief Officer of the I.D.F. Women's Corp, in order to prepare us for military life. "A girl's role," she tells us, "is to bring the *zic* (*"spark"*—of love, of hope, of passion) and the chic to the military." She was presenting us with the accepted view that women are meant to be an agent for the softening of men. Our good taste, our sensitivity, our tact and perhaps...well, yes, perhaps our sexuality would reduce the brutality within the system. A flower in the office, a smile at 6 A.M., an ironed shirt despite battle conditions—these were our goals of excellence. Good luck, girls. Parting from our Basic Training base, we moved on to the real army.

My first exercise in using "*zic* and *chic*" took place in an ugly office somewhere in the heart of Tel Aviv. Pacing back and forth in the outer room, I waited nervously for the interview that would determine my future assignment in the military. "What's the commander like?" I asked the secretary in an attempt to strengthen myself with a bit of information.

"LIFE IN THE FIELD IS AN ASSURED PRESCRIPTION FOR AN IMMATURE MARRIAGE."

"The commander?" she responded with a smile of glee. "He's just fine. He's a perfect idiot."

Throughout my military service, I would encounter this attitude many times. As the proportion of women inducted into the military is low (married women are exempt from army service) and as the criteria for their recruitment differ from those applying to men, it appears that the average intelligence of a woman soldier is greater than that of a male soldier. (According to statistics published in the Israeli daily *Ha'Aretz* in 1989, 88% of female soldiers had completed 12 years of schooling while only 69% of male soldiers had received an equivalent education.)

To me, it seemed that the gaps in intelligence and schooling were even greater. What often resulted was the following combination: an intelligent woman soldier with a moronic male boss. The true problem begins when the commander's virtues include a fragile ego and an inflated perception of his job. Two scenarios generally develop. In the first, the woman learns to hide her intelligence and capitalize on her abundance of I.Q. to manipulate the situation into making her life with the ruler easier. In this instance, she completes her military service successfully, having amassed a collection of amusing views as well as several unfortunate perceptions about the nature of productive behavior in the work place, all thanks to the men.

In the second scenario, the woman soldier is unable to hide her intelligence, and one can forecast for her a depressing script infused with daily weeping. On one of our bases I met a skinny young woman who suffered chronically from high intelligence and depression. This young woman, who never for an instant let go of her volume of Thomas Mann, was adopted by the sergeant-major of the base as his secretary so that he could steadily dole out abuse to her. I have no doubt that *The Magic Mountain* only provoked his sadism. The man hollered and hollered, and she simply became thinner and more depressed. By the time I left the base, she carried with her a look of ascetic purity. In other words, she was not all there.

But let us return to my virgin experience with "*zic* and chic." I entered the commander's office, stood at attention and saluted. Embarrassed at being seen acting out such movements, I wore a sweater several sizes too large for me. Since it was a warm day, I had rolled up the sleeves. My commander spoke on the phone and waved at me edgily. As he hung up the phone, he conveyed his first message to me. "I could have you court-martialed," he informed me. For an instant my mind was completely blank, but suddenly I recalled the advice of the Chief Officer of the I.D.F. Women's Corps, and I gently fluttered my eyelashes to show him just how well I knew he could court-martial me. My commander instantly softened up and explained, "Sleeves are folded on a shirt. It is forbidden to fold the sleeves of a sweater." "I didn't know," I whispered in the voice of the best little girl in my kindergarten. "I could register an official complaint," he warned me, his voice resounding with satisfaction. My eyes had never looked so innocent. They told him that although I knew he could court-martial me and even have me sent to military prison, I knew he was a kind and merciful man and that he merely wanted to teach me a good lesson. "I just wanted to teach you a lesson," he said with a kind uncle's expression on his face. "Thank you, " I whispered as my voice cracked. "Thank you."

I was assigned to a small military office—two officers, one male soldier and one female soldier. Humanity does not know how to recognize happiness when experiencing it. Today I realize that happiness, or at least the relative military equivalent of it, dwelled in that office. The amount of work time averaged between one and two hours daily, and we were free to do as we pleased with the rest of our day. We could wander about the city, read thick novels, drink coffee and drink more coffee. We made sure to keep all this within the bounds of good taste. At the right moment we knew how to appear incredibly diligent and even exhausted from our arduous labors.

Why could I not stick with this rare little spot of harmony? The "field" beckoned me "the true military life" was calling my name. My soul, it seems, desired a bit of real soldiering.

Several weeks ago I happened to pass by my old high school. On the sidewalk sat several twelfth-grade girls talking among themselves. My eavesdropping ears picked up one sentence. "What I really want," said one girl, "is to be an Operations Clerk for a commando unit." Twelve years have passed since I sat on that sidewalk. The faces have changed. The dreams and the symbols have remained exactly as they were.

Most of us wanted to be Operations Clerks in the commando units. We were not exactly sure what an Operations Clerk was, but the word "operations" sounded so good. It sounded so operational. We had been raised on a slew of romantic military heroes whose shells were hard but whose hearts were gold, and we wanted to be there, where the truly important things occur. If one was going to be a secretary or clerk, one might as well be an Operations Clerk. We wanted to contribute; we wanted to be in the company of the great contributors.

"WHILE THE BEST GO TO PILOTING, CLEARLY THE PRETTIEST GO TO THE PILOTS."

As I moved towards my goal of being an Operations Clerk for a commando unit, I did my best to appear like a poster of the 1948 woman soldier, and even more importantly, to feel like that poster. Generally, I tried very hard and at times even neared success. I wore the red cap of the paratroopers battalion and had officer's ranks on my shoulders. I joined in the night-time marches, the war games,

and every other element of the fighter's army. My vocabulary shrivelled to half its original size, and abstract ideas all but disappeared. But despite this, I knew a thing or two about navigation, and I could fire a semi-automatic Galil rifle. I knew how to throw a grenade. Today I am sickened by the knowledge that all of my efforts at adaptation were completely superfluous. My work day continued to average between one and two hours, but now the scenery was "hipper" (I was finally an Operations Clerk for a commando unit) and the depression even greater.

The way I had reached my army career goal was thanks to the Battalion Commander who figured that an additional woman in the area would do no one any harm. "Most of the girls here have a boyfriend who's an officer. We've produced four weddings in this battalion," he bragged to me during my acceptance interview.

During the two years which followed, three or four more women of the ten in the battalion joined that statistic. Life in the field was an assured prescription for an immature marriage. He and she on the galloping jeep, the tight locks of his curled hair, hers flying in the wind, and suddenly the ugliness of the army has turned into the kitsch scenery of a love story. What happened to these couples after the props and scenery disappeared has yet to be researched.

"The girls are the officers' privilege," I was told by a woman in one of the battalions. She possessed a complete philosophy on the hierarchical rights of males to enter the women soldiers' quarters. It was clear to her that our quarters was completely off limits to ordinary male soldiers. Officers, though, particularly those from the combat divisions, were warmly welcomed. Operations Sergeants and Tank Commanders (both non-commissioned officers) were questionable cases and demanded special okays. The truth is that, with no written law, the system worked. What pure soul could be attracted to a bedraggled and degraded enlisted man standing before her? We are, after all, not that liberated.

Thus, unknowingly, women serve as one of the reinforcements for men to advance in the military. As Tarzan moves further away from his Basic Training and adorns his shoulders with symbols of his masculine strength, so do his chances with Jane improve. A woman officer in the Air Force told me of an even more caustic system of reinforcements. Every seasonal round of newly inducted women soldiers who arrived at the flight squadron would stand in the administrative office. According to the prestige of their office, the representatives of the various units in the squadron would arrive to select secretaries. The prettiest ones were first to be chosen, and later the not-so-pretty ones. The procedure was known and accepted, and every office was aware of its place in the hierarchy. Every girl knew how she had been ranked. While "the best go to piloting" (the motto for recruitment of young men to the air force), clearly "the prettiest go to the pilots."

When I could no longer stand my base, my job or myself, I began to hitchhike crazily. It did not matter how, where or for how long, the point was to get away. Most women soldiers who hitchhike are not stupid—something pressures us until we are driven to act stupidly. More than once I stood alone in the middle of the night by the side of a dark and lonely road, feeling frightened, and knowing that what I was doing was dangerous. Still, I did it. I have seen similar self-destructiveness in women soldiers who angrily gorge themselves as if, in their despair, they seek to lose all shape or form. It is customary to blame the military kitchens for the familiar phenomenon of women soldiers gaining weight. I wonder if the rate of depression among women in the army has ever been studied.

While I passed my days in increasing gloom, it distressed me even further to watch those most rewarded and dedicated of female soldiers: the Company Clerks. This job has been mythologized and appears in some incarnation in every unit: Hadas, who didn't visit home for three months. Yonit, who travelled several hours to Hadera to bring soldiers a cake. Limor, who marched the entire "120" (the final compulsory hike/march made by the paratroopers) along with her company. And always, always, there is the story of the egoistic Lilach, who really only cares about her boyfriend, and for whom it's high time to be kicked out.

The role of the Company Clerk speaks to a particularly potent female stereotype. Dressed in men's pants and an undershirt, the Company Clerk is the "little mother" who never forgets a single birthday; she's the company's "little sister," at whom any soldier from another company better not even think of looking; and, of course, she is the dedicated secretary who types the Company Commander's reports until the wee hours of the night when the meetings have finally let out. Like any classic woman, she is a 24-hour-on-call para-psychologist. She listens, understands, encourages, calms male aggressions and, most of all, mediates between the soldier-sons and the commander-fathers. When a woman of this type is older, she starts her days baking bread and continues on with the washing of diapers, the darning of socks and the typing of the future doctor's thesis. So much energy—all, to my mind, producing negative personal, cultural and political results.

Another classic type of woman in the army is that poor soul who is the first female to fill a job which has only been filled by men. I knew one of these women officers. Through no fault of her own, she was extremely confusing and confused. With fighter-pilot sunglasses, her hands in her belt, she rode the jeep into the field. A minute later she would do something weird—refer in a deep voice to one of the male officers as "hon," or later, confound herself even further by leaning on some male shoulder in the office.

This nineteen-year-old young woman was

the object of incredibly conflicting expectations. When "professional," she was told she was not feminine. When "feminine" (imbued with *zic* and chic), she was told she was not professional. The paradigm for her job was produced by male officers to whom the sunglasses and the deep voice seemed vital. Who could have helped her? To whom could she have felt any closeness? To the secretaries in the office? To the officers in the field?

Women's military service in Israel today creates a sexist trap which seems to leave no avenues for escape. It can be said that the position of a woman in the Israeli army today is comparable to that of a person who can perform any job in a hospital other than treat patients, or do anything in an orchestra other than play a musical instrument. The results, in terms of status, are clear.

"A GIRL'S ROLE," SHE TELLS US, "IS TO BRING THE ZIC AND THE CHIC INTO THE MILITARY."

Let me move from describing my personal experiences to actually offering some political and social solutions. Some of you may be impatiently wondering why I am unable to sublimate my feminism for the good of the national cause. With men sacrificing so much, some of you may be muttering to yourselves: why can't women forego just a bit and fulfill the duties asked of them? To these questions, I have two responses.

First, the military truly is a male issue. Neither armies nor wars were invented by women. Women did not develop the weapons and generally were not the ones deciding when to enter the battlefield. Millions of women have been the victims of wars that the men waged among themselves throughout history. Just as some ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel are exempt from military service, as they do not see themselves sharing the interests which it represents, so should women have a similar option. The State, according to Neturei Karta (the ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist political party) is an invention of the Zionists. Therefore, let them eat the fruits of their labor. The military and the wars, I feel like saying at times, are male inventions. Let the men eat the fruits of their labor. And anyway, why am I so willing for my representation in the military to be greater than my part in the government which is responsible for this military?

I hold by the romantic notion which claims that if women controlled things, we would quickly be freed of arms. The only problem is that the very quality of women which could bring an end to wars is the same one which prevents women from wanting to run things.

Secondly, let us assume that the military actually needs the female force and that maintaining the Women's Corps is a rational issue and not just a symbolic one. (Has anyone ever checked if it would be cheaper to exempt women from the military, use male clerks and pay them wages?) Still, even if maintaining a Women's Corps is practical in the short term, the long-term price must be weighed.

The years of military service are generally the first years in a task-oriented framework outside of the parents' home. What is learned during this period can be critical throughout the rest of one's life. What women learn in the military is that "work" means men in active roles and women in support roles.

Women learn to measure themselves and their achievements in terms of the aid they provide and not in terms of their own productivity. (In the sum of things, combat is the military task.) Women learn that if they want to influence, they must be the power behind the power. To one degree or another, these ideals are internalized many years prior to military service. Still, it is difficult to comprehend why a country shrieking over loss of emigrating brain power continue to batter and break down such a viable work force.

One of the greatest wastes taking place in the State of Israel today is the unrealized potential of its women. This waste is a consequence of a process of learning in which the military is an essential chapter. Significant experience in new roles could lead to new female behaviors. In Israel, the accepted response to such a statement is to draw our attention to the few female instructors in the Armored Corps and the female officers in the Artillery Corps. These women are a quaint poster, a pretty advertisement of the military. They are even an excellent means of fundraising from Jews in the Diaspora. But they are only a token few.

It is really time to change things, but in order to do so, we must stop viewing women's military service as a symbol and begin to study seriously its benefits and costs.

Possibly it is preferable to exempt all women from service. Contrary to popular belief, it is likely that releasing women from military service would narrow the achievement gap between the sexes. In a culture where the progress of women in academia and in the workplace is still being delayed because of childrearing, an addition of two years could be extremely significant. Saved the two years of miserable education that they receive in the military, these women could, in turn, use this time to develop professionally to the benefit of society as a whole.

Another and more preferable possibility is a gendered division of labor during the periods of military service. This would entail the creation of a separate system for women whose activities would differ completely from those of the men. We live in a society where the range of a person's behavior is determined to a large degree by gender. Three years of separation from the men (calm down...it's only for the work hours) and the gaining of experience in running an independent system could aid women in acquiring new skills.

Isn't it interesting that when there are no men to be found, women suddenly find themselves able to repair the electrical circuits? (No, I am not opposed to men fixing the electricity. When Jane is absolutely confident in her ability to do it herself, she can then ask Tarzan to do it for her. In this instance, she will also be able to state honestly that she chooses in the meantime to bake a cake, and then the word "choice" will have true meaning.)

Three years of service without having to make use of *zic* or chic could bring into the working world women who do not perceive themselves to be helpers and do not limit themselves to being support staff. Without the fathers, the rulers and the hunters, women will be able to re-examine the immanent qualities of femininity and the claims regarding the existence of a separate female ethos.

It is quite possible that women would create a system which is only negligibly different from the male power structure. Nonetheless the possibility that it might not be so elicits a tremendous degree of curiosity. Just as Zionism provides a test of the truth of the Jewish self-image, so would a separate labor system measure the qualities of women and their ability to develop for themselves a definition of womanhood. □

Gail Hareven is an essayist, literary critic and playwright living in Tel Aviv.

Homecoming Queen

The author, "Queen nominee," in a photo for her college newspaper, 1959

by Marlene Roberts

When my grandmother arrived at Ellis Island she was given an English name, Lena. This was to become her obsession for the rest of her life. She would say her real name was Liebe, Yiddish for "love," but at Immigration they just wrote down her name as Lena. Now she had to be Lena. This isn't an unusual immigrant story, but to Lena it became a deep personal injustice.

Whenever given the opportunity, she would cite other names she would have preferred; Leah, Lenore, Lillian—names that were American. This name business seemed silly because her husband called her Lady, and everyone else referred to her as The Mrs. or Mrs. Roberts. Only very close relatives might call her by her first name, but even then they'd more likely call her Ma or Tante. Still, she saw her name change as something bigger and more upsetting than other events I thought were worse, such as the Europe she came from or her life when she got to America.

Liebe Feld was born in 1888 in Shrensk, in the state of Plotzk, Poland. She described her life there to me as "horrible"—How physically hard she had to work beginning at an early age, what little her family got in the way of money or food, how the possibility of another pogrom was always with them.

In 1909 her fiance, Jacob Graubard (who *asked* Immigration to rename him Roberts), sent her money for the steerage to America. After she arrived, they married, and Lena got a job in a sweatshop on the Lower East Side.

Once settled, my grandmother had hope—at least for her children. After she had successfully raised three children (a doctor, a teacher and a beauty), her daughter the teacher died. This left Lena, nearly sixty, with a one year old, me, to raise.

Lena spoke English with a heavy accent, and never learned to read or write. Since she stayed almost totally among "her own," learning written English was never a necessity. I, therefore, didn't learn "real English" until I went to school.

While I was in grade school, every day at three Lena would be waiting for me, sitting at the kitchen table, smoking a cigarette, and boiling a pot of water. We'd make tea and then sit, sipping together. I'd tell what I'd learned in school and what the kids were like. Lena might mention something she'd read that day in *The Jewish Daily Forward* or had seen on the soap operas. We often sat idly together with our teas, feeling contentment.

By the time I started junior high school, I no

Lena, Marlene and Blanche, 1942

longer had time for my grandmother. My friends and prospective dates were the center, if not the whole, of my life. My grandmother was an embarrassment. My relationship with her became hostile. Sadly, like many adolescents, I'd either not talk for days, or when I did decide to talk, it was to fight. I'd say sarcastically to Lena, "His name is Ed Sullivan, SULLIVAN, not Solomon! He is not Jewish. Also the Irish do not *all* beat their wives, drink till they fall down drunk, and call you a dirty Jew behind your back. And as for your views on the *shvartzes,* how would you know anything about them since you've never met any?" (Our sometimes maid Helen was Irish.)

Then my grandmother would let me know how she felt about my new American fresh ways. Always, when making her point, she'd stand waving her arms in the air while looking up at the ceiling, to give me, I thought, the impression that she was also speaking to God. These encounters went on for years.

"The Queen-nominee (me) sat on a six-foot black bowling ball facing her 10 bowling-pin princesses. It was embarrassing even then."

During my first semester away at University of Rhode Island, an event at college made us close again: My dorm nominated me for Homecoming Queen. This meant that on Homecoming Weekend, 1959, I was dragged around the football field on the back of a flatbed truck during the half-time of the football game. The theme of our dorm's float was "Bowl Them Over Rhodey, Strike 'Em Down." There was going to be a giant bowling ball next to the flatbed's cab, and at the other end of the float, ten girls were arranged to represent bowling pins. The Queen-nominee (me) would sit on a six-foot, black crepe-paper bowling ball directly facing her ten bowling-pin princesses. It was embarrassing to think about even then.

I asked my grandparents to witness the extravaganza but was positive they wouldn't. I described the day as being of no interest to them—centering around football and bowling, with me making an appearance at half-time. I told them I'd send photos from the school newspaper. I feared looking ridiculous and didn't want my grandparents (who were so proud of what I was doing in college) to see me.

Homecoming Weekend. I was startled when my grandmother showed up. Though my grandfather had announced the week before that he was too sick to make the drive, Lena decided that wasn't going to stop her. She was set on seeing "the University", and on watching all "those" people admiring me. If she could find America, she could find Rhode Island, she announced to her family. In the end, my cousin Nora volunteered to drive her.

It began to rain early in the day, and continued all afternoon. Nora said she would wait for us in the warm student-union building, come out to see the half-time parade, and then return to the student union to wait for the trip back. My grandmother stood in the rain for the entire game. She appeared to miss nothing. She wouldn't sit on the bleachers, initially because she had no idea how they were used. When my friends and I explained them to her, she still refused. Most probably she objected to their being dirty, and she didn't see anyone putting a cloth on their seats (which was what she always did on park benches). My friends and I finally realized that trying to get her to sit was a lost cause.

I was able to be with my grandmother for most of the day, only leaving at half-time when I was on parade. My grandmother stood fascinated (if also appearing a bit self-conscious) as she viewed in her own way what was happening. She had never seen and probably had never heard about football games. Baseball, specifically the Brooklyn Dodgers, was the only sport my grandfather watched, and that my grandmother, therefore, knew about. But football was what she was here to see, along with thirteen floats she didn't understand, and her granddaughter, the star on one of them. My recollection of that day was that I was full of fear, specifically fear that the red dress I'd paid $50 for (the most expensive piece of clothing I owned) would be stained by the wet black crepe-paper I was sitting on. I remember perching on that bowling ball and telling myself to smile, wave to

the people in the bleachers, and avoid looking at those ten stupid bowling-pin princesses staring at me.

With great relief, I made it around the field safely, and when I changed into my pants, my dress was still clean. Rejoining my grandmother, I explained that at the end of the game they would announce the 1959 Homecoming Queen. I told her that I had no chance of winning. "Ma," I said, "These things are predictable. Out of the thirteen Queen-nominees representing their sorority or dorm, only one wins and that is almost certainly either the girlfriend of the captain of the football team, a Tri-Delt or a Chi O. Please," I said, "come out of the rain and cold."

My grandmother, of course, didn't understand what I was talking about; she refused to listen or to leave. Finally the Queen's name was announced, and Cathy (the captain of the football team's girlfriend) accepted her crown. Lena could now go home, hungry, exhausted, chilled, but with her eyes glowing.

Lena wouldn't eat outside her kosher home, so she hadn't eaten all day. But as I was later to hear, by the time she got home all negatives were forgotten—the standing, the rain, the cold. Lena wouldn't stop talking about her day in Rhode Island, giving blow by blow descriptions of everything she could remember about her granddaughter becoming Queen.

Thereafter, whenever my grandmother referred to "when Marlene was Queen," I never corrected her. To the school, Cathy was Queen. To Cathy's mother, Cathy was Queen. To my grandmother, Cathy was nothing. Even if I had been on the float as a bowling pin, Lena would have insisted I was Queen.

This was when we made peace with each other.

A year earlier I would have screamed that I wasn't the Queen and we'd fight about that. But at Homecoming Weekend I somehow realized that my grandmother deserved to be accepted as she was. To Lena there was only one other Queen—

Bess Myerson (non-Jews didn't count nor the fact that Ms. Myerson's title wasn't Queen). Now Lena would be able to tell her friends that one of her offspring was also a Queen in America.

Somehow in accepting this, I had become a grown-up (in this one way at least) and saw my grandmother as a person doing the best she could. It became irrelevant that Lena may have said things I didn't like or believe. What I saw suddenly was that she never harmed anyone, and that she deserved to be who she was.

At nineteen (it was 1960) I married, and my grandmother gave me two pieces of advice: finish college, and don't change your name. I listened to both. By going to night school I earned my degree two months before the birth of my second child. As to changing my name, I tried to when I changed schools after I was married, but there were a lot of forms I had to fill out and somehow I never got around to it.

When I got my diploma I showed Lena I'd listened to her advice on both counts and left it at that. She hugged me and cried. For the rest of my life I was very happy I never "officially" changed my name; first at school, then at work, then on credit cards. It wasn't my name that was so important, it was what it represented; me, my right to choose, my connection to Lena.

During my twenties I began to understand the importance of keeping your own name, and to see why Lena reacted so violently to her name change. For a long time I had thought her anger and resentment was that of an irrational, old, disillusioned woman, but I began to comprehend that names were what the Germans had taken away from the Jews, American slave-owners had taken from their slaves, and husbands had taken from their wives. It was also the first thing Lena experienced in her dream land, America. Ellis Island took away the name she might have chosen as her own.

Many years later Lena lay in an oblivious state for five years in a nursing home. Every Saturday I visited her, and I never knew what to do. I'd arrive smiling, check her sheets, tip the staff and stand by the side of her bed trying to believe that somehow she knew I was there. After a while I'd start talking, just to have something to do. "Hey Ma, it's me, Marlene. Want to talk about the parade, about Bess and me?" I fanticized that Lena was understanding me, and was thinking of herself as the matriarch of an American Queen...therefore, she was also a real American.

After Lena died I moved to Brazil. I guess I never felt like a real American either. In Brazil they knew I was a foreigner; in America I could always pass.

"My grandmother gave me two pieces of advice: finish college and don't change your name."

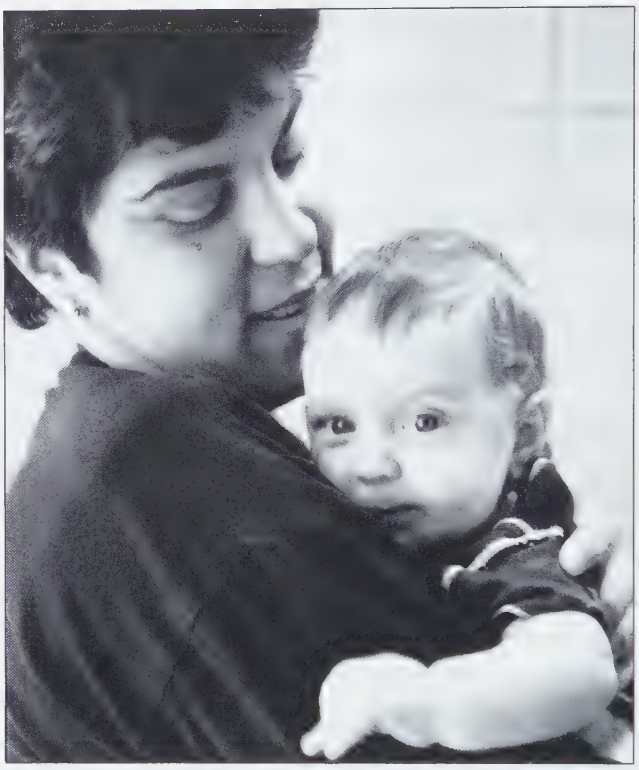
CIRCUMCISION
THE POWER OF THE TRIBE

by David Kotzen-Reich

My wife Judy and I never thought much about circumcision until we discovered Ariel was on the way. When I was born in 1950, circumcision had long become a routine hospital procedure. And since my very secular parents did not even contemplate a religious ceremony, our pediatrician, off in the neonatal ward, surgically removed my foreskin before my parents took me home.

Once, when I was in summer camp, I noticed while in the shower how strange another camper looked. Only years later when I was old enough to understand, did it dawn on me that this young boy's body was perfectly fine, and that it was I who had been altered.

Then came one day in February last year, five months before Judy was due. Judy had undergone amniocentesis and we were biting our nails for three weeks waiting to find out if we were carrying a healthy fetus. The lab results were late. I was at my job as a caption editor at a Hollywood studio when she called. "It's a boy!" she said.



Judy Kotzen–Reich and David's and Judy's son Ariel, age 3 months.

The joy and relief of that moment was quickly replace by a low-grade agony that lasted until Ariel's eighth day of life, the day all Jewish boys are expected to have a brit milah. Not convinced of the medical reasons for circumcision, we suddenly felt the need for justification for what we perceived as a barbaric ritual we were expected to conduct on our not-yet-born son.

Here we were taking natural childbirth classes every week, studying relaxation techniques, and watching films of Brazilian women giving birth squatting on the floor. A *bris* seemed to be an unnecessary intervention, like much else in modern American obstetrics.

Still, Judy and I confronted one person after another who viewed circumcision favorably. The more traditional Jews we talked to thought we were being ridiculous to question such an important Jewish practice; other secular Jews cited the medical reasons some doctors and researchers still give for circumcision—that the foreskin is unclean, that it can cause penile and cervical cancer. My own sister's reaction echoed a feeling expressed by some other women we talked to about circumcision. She simply thought the uncircumcised penis unattractive and unhygienic.

During our dilemma, Judy fell into a rare argument with one of her sisters who unequivocally believed in circumcision. An aunt, who saw all five of her sons circumcised, couldn't understand why we were making such a big deal. A Reconstructionist rabbi persuasively argued that without a circumcision our son would feel very alienated from other Jewish boys.

Paving new ground proved lonely. We soon learned to keep our mouths shut, and at times, even between ourselves, since Judy was more traditional than I. Regardless, we probed and probed our feelings for four months.

Since we both recognized the importance of Jewish values and culture and hoped Ariel would feel the same, we were concerned about his reaction when he was old enough to recognize he was different from other Jewish boys. I could imagine how awful I'd have felt to be different, remembering that fellow camper in the shower. But by the time Ariel was old enough, many non-Jewish boys would be uncircumcised. A newspaper story I had recently read stated that up to 39% of all American baby boys escape circumcision.

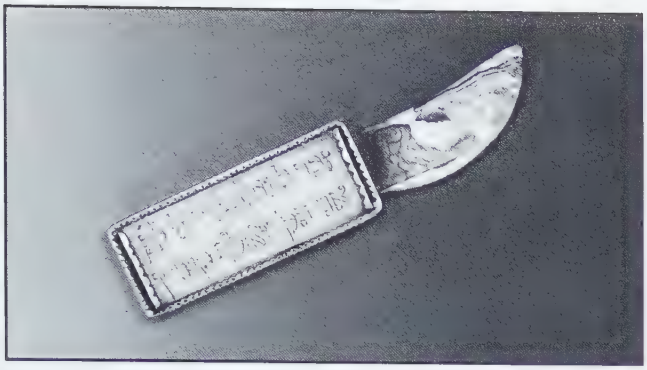
I also learned that 90% of the world remains uncircumcised. Circumcision in America blossomed after the medical profession decided early in the century that it was healthier. The rest of the world never went along with it.

In the meantime, we got caught up in preparing for Ariel's birth and my coaching. We actually provisionally prepared for a *brit milah* — though we told Rabbi Comess-Daniels of Congregation Shir Shalom in Los Angeles that it very well might be a "bloodless" *bris*.

Ariel was born early in the morning of July 21, 1990, after 21 hours of labor. It was a Saturday. His *brit milah* would be on the following Shabbat. Judy had been leaning more and more for circumcision in the previous weeks, and on the night before the *brit*, told me she wanted Ariel to have one. However, she was willing to let me make the final decision since I seemed to feel more strongly about it.

That proved to be our final discussion on the matter. I had made my decision as well, although, like Judy, I can't give a rational explanation for it.

I don't remember much about the afternoon of July 28, 1990 in our apartment. I do



Look frightening? Circumcision knife, Poland, 1858. The inscription reads, "Live in your blood," on one side; and, "In everlasting remembrance of his circumcision – I, the humble Wolfe Konitz," on the other.

remember my father criticizing me for wearing shorts on such a formal occasion. My attire was the last thing on my mind. I also remember my anger and grief as Judy and I watched the *mohel* prepare little Ariel for the Holy Covenant. Even after my decision, I did not succumb quietly to the Tribe's demands. Dr. Sam Kunin is a respected Los Angeles urologist and part-time *mohel*, certified by the Brit Milah Board of Reform Judaism. But to me, Kunin represented The Enforcer of an abusive ritual.

on the circumcision board, on our diningroom table. Kunin began the ceremony. I remember he referred to the Bible prescribing the duty of all fathers to cut their sons' foreskins. Thank God that since then someone at least had decided it was okay to hire out!

He reassured us that the worst was actually over. The cut wouldn't hurt very much since Ariel's foreskin was numb from the clamp. Ariel continued to cry, more from the constraint than anything else, if you believed Kunin. It was impossible to tell when the cut was made anyway since I wasn't looking. All groggy from sucking on a wine-soaked cloth, Ariel fell asleep very quickly.

Today, when I think about the big deal we made, I still shake my head and wonder: Were we really able for a brief moment to see through a powerful and timeless myth? Or, were we simply overreacting, as many friends and relatives (themselves parents) suggested? After all, it's only natural for first-time parents to be extremely overprotective. In fact, my memory of the ordeal gets fuzzier as the months pass and we concentrate on our beauti

SOBS WRACKED MY BODY. WHAT WOULD THE LONG-LASTING EFFECTS OF THIS STUPID RITUAL BE ON OUR BABY?

Kunin is a big man, at least in my memory. And we watched as big bad Kunin took Ariel into the bathroom where the lights were bright and it was easier for him to work. He strapped our little baby to a plastic board, pulled back his foreskin, and cleaned his penis. He inserted a bell clamp under the foreskin.

My parents, sisters-in-law, father-in-law, and Rabbi Comess-Daniels waited in the living room where the ceremony was to take place, although one of Judy's sisters and her father came back briefly to watch.

Ariel, too, of course, protested with waves of high-pitched screams that gripped me like a straightjacket. Unable to watch anymore, I stood outside the door with Judy. I clung to her as sobs racked my body. How dare this man and his tradition violate my family! My God! I cried. What will the long-lasting effects of this stupid ritual be on our baby?

We moved to the living room where Kunin placed Ariel, still strapped in and lying prone

ful and healthy little seventeen-month-old boy. I never asked to be in this Tribe. I was born into it. I questioned its powerful ritual and for one short period stood apart from my People. The place where I stood was utterly lonely and frightening.

I was very resentful about following a tradition merely because every Jew has. Jewish parents have obediently circumcised their male babies simply because all Jewish boys have had it done since the time of Sarah and Abraham. But, somehow, through our ordeal, that felt reason enough.

Actually, I'm glad we wrestled with Tradition. I don't feel like we lost. I feel we got closer to the Tribe.

David Kotzen-Reich has been a newspaper reporter for the Ventura County Star—Free Press in California and the Enterprise in Beaumont, Texas. He is currently a full-time father and freelance writer living in Farmington Hills, Michigan.

"To view the Holocaust through the eyes of children is to see it for all its madness and injustice. **It is impossible to read this book without raging.**"—Anne Roiphe, *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*

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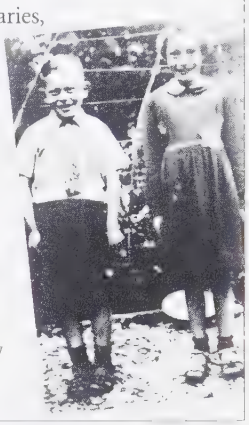

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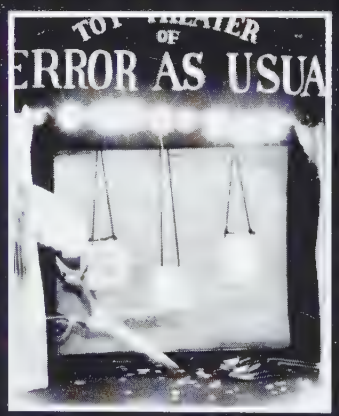
The room darkens and becomes black. An accordion begins to play haunting chords called "devil's triads", and a woman's voice weaves a spine-chilling "*toytn tants*"—a Yiddish "death-dance" song from the 16th century, a form of entertainment popular during times of plague.

Suddenly, a minuscule ring of Christmas lights flash on, outlining the tiny cardboard stage (15 inches by 17 inches), and making visible a looming puppeteer (Jenny Romaine).

As the narrator intones the story of *Santa Kloz*, the curtain is parted and Romaine silently begins to move primitive "found" props across the space: A metronome with taped-on paper wings [representing time taking us back desolately to the Great Depression]; a "city" drawn crudely on newspaper; a scissors [representing a shopkeeper] which "speaks" to us by opening and shutting; an orange rolling back and forth across the stage like a baleful obsession [representing the thought of food to a starving man]; a little Santa Claus pin-cushion [*Santa Kloz*, of course]; a shirt-cardboard skeleton [Death]; shiny, gift-wrapped boxes [well-to-do Christmas shoppers], and, finally, the two main protagonists of the production—a little boy named Alfred and his mother, each denoted by a plain cardboard box with jointed cardboard arms. [Alfred's box is stamped with an Arm & Hammer insignia—a triple entendre on hammer and sickle, and Armand Hammer.]

The audience is intense, sucked in by the tiny scale, the makeshift props, the mockingly "unhidden" puppeteer, the inscrutable power of the whole seductive thing. The audience experiences the little production as heartbreakingly fragile, and so finds itself responding protectively—feeling deeply, sweetly, almost hypnotically moved.

The full performance of Terror As Usual's "*Santa Kloz Hot Gekhalesht*" lasts for only nine minutes. The audience, acutely mesmerized, sits through it again and again



"Santa Kloz Hot

SANTA F

A Production by Jenny Romaine's experime

Es iz geven far Krismes.
It happened before Christmas.

Mikes tate hot nisht gearbet.
Mike's father was out of work.

Er iz gegangen yedn togh zukhn arbet un nisht gefunen.
Every day he looked for work and couldn't find any.

Di kinder hobn nisht genug gegesn.
The children didn't have enough to eat.

Ober vos zol der tate ton?
But what could Father do?

Er hot azoy gevolt arbetn, un di kinder hobn azoy gevolt esn.
He wanted to work, and the children wanted to eat.

Eynmol gefint mikes tate in tsaytung
One day Mike's father read in the newspaper

az men darf a man in a krom.
that they wanted to hire a man at a store.

Es iz nokh geven zeyer fri.
It was still early in the morning,

Ober der tate is glaykh gelofn in krom.
but Father ran straight to the store.

Er hot afile ken bisn broyt nisht gehat nokh in moyl.
He didn't even stop to eat.

In der krom fregt men im:
At the store they asked him,

vilstu zikh onton vi Santa Kloz?
you wanna dress up like Santa Claus?

Darfst gornisht ton, onton zikh vi Santa Claus.
You don't have to do anything, just dress up like Santa Claus.

Shteyn do in krom un shmeyklen tsu di mentsh vos kumen arayn koyfn.
Stand here in the store and smile at the people who come in to shop.

Mikes tate hot ongeton a bord un royte kleyder un iz geblibn in krom.
Mike's father put on a beard and a red suit and stood there in the store.

Er iz geshtanen af di fis a sho, nokh a sho un nokh a sho.
He stayed on his feet for hours on end.

Er iz gevorn hungerik.
He became hungry.

Er hot dokh gornisht gegesn fun fartog on.
He hadn't eaten all day.

Mitamol hot er derfilt vi der kop dreyt zikh im, zayne fis vern shvakh, un zayne hent nemen tsitern.
All at once he felt his head spinning, his legs grew weak, and his hands began to shake.

Er hot mer nisht gekent aynshteyn, un iz gefaln afn dil.
He could no longer stand up, and he fell to the floor.

Di mentshn fun krom zaynen tsugelofn un genumen in rateven.
The people in the store ran to him and tried to help.

FUN HUNGER!
FUN HUNGER!
FUN HUNGER!
FUN HUNGER!

halesht"

N T S

ter, Terror As Usual.

Avade fun hunger, hot gezogt a froy, velkhe hot gehaltn a kind far der hand.
Of course from hunger, said a woman who was holding a child by the hand.

Mame, hot gezogt dos kind,
Mama, said the child,

Santa Kloz hot dokh azoy fil zakhn far alemen.
Santa Claus has so much for everyone.

Farvos hot er nisht ken broyt far zikh?
Why doesn't he have any food for himself?

Nishto ken Santa Kloz.
There is no Santa Claus.

Ez iz an arbetlozer.
This poor man is out of work.

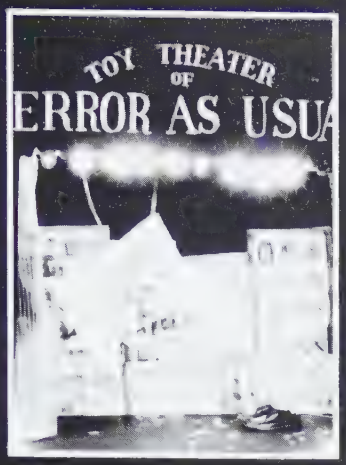
Men hot im ongeton andere zakhn, me zol meynen, az es iz do a Santa Kloz.
They dressed him in that suit, you should think there's a Santa Claus.

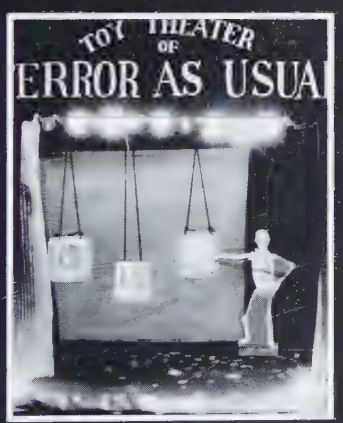
Dos kind hot geheysn Alfred.
The child's name was Alfred.

Shpeter hot er dertseylt ale kinder in gas, as es iz nishto ken Santa Kloz.
Later he told all the children in the neighborhood that there's no such thing as Santa Claus.

Er aleyn hot gezen vi Santa Kloz hot gekhalesht fun hunger.
He himself had seen Santa Claus faint from hunger.

Siz geven an arbetlozer, ibergeton in andere kleyder.
It was a man who had no job, dressed up in a Santa suit.





Jenny Romaine, 29, stilt dancer, puppeteer and performer, has worked and toured extensively with the Bread and Puppet Theater, Ninth Street Theater and the Expanding Secret Company. Employed in the sound archives at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Romaine is presently a Performance Studies graduate student at New York University. Here she muses on *Santa Kloz*'s politics, and the traditions of Yiddish, agitprop and toy theater:

Well, *"Santa Kloz"* is a dark morality play about capitalism written sixty years ago by Jewish Communists: A starving man gets a job during the Depression as a fat, gift-dispensing Santa. I represented the characters as boxes or packages because I was playing on the Marxist idea of "commodity fetishism"—rampant around Christmas-time—in which we attribute to *things* the quality of people, and then we treat people as things. The mother and Alfred are simple cardboard boxes ("box populi"), but the shoppers are glitzy gift boxes.

"My box-characters have oversized attached arms so that they can gesticulate broadly while they make big declamatory statements. This style of theater derives from agitprop [agitation + propaganda], an openly ideological art that's usually performed on street corners, or for huge audiences at a strike in front of a factory or, say, at a big union meeting. Part of the subversiveness of my toy theater is that it's tiny, not huge like traditional agitprop, but powerful—like a T.V.

"The tradition of toy theater itself (not having anything to do with agitprop) is very old. My content, though, is new and very political. Besides this script of "*Santa Kloz*," I perform weekly with my toy theater of Terror As Usual, always with changing political scripts, usually retelling ("recycling") the week's news subversively. Literally too, my props and puppets are recycled newspaper (what's called "cheap art"). It's theater of trash—high concept/cheap means—using society's cast-off, objects to tell important stories. It's the opposite of fancy, inflated-art-market art that doesn't critique the status quo.

"In Jewish terms, my production of "*Santa Kloz*", except for its tiny scale, is probably similar to Yiddish theater of the '30's, to famous experimental acting troupes like Artef. Artef wanted its form to be as radical as its message. It's a tradition I inherit: Yiddish, politically conscious, emphasizing social relationships (gender/class) instead of psychological ones.

"Of course, there are plenty of layers of political comment and irony in the production of "*Santa Kloz*". Christmas, usually a time of abundance, here becomes a time when Santa faints *fun hunger*. Christmas becomes not the time of the great birth, but the time of Santa dying or going under. The meaning of Christmas as a time of rebirth is critically understood as a rebirth through the acquisition of new objects.

"When I first performed "*Santa*" at a Yiddish folkarts camp during Christmas week of 1990, the U.S. was just mobilizing for mass slaughter in Iraq—a war to protect our lifestyle of consumption, of sacred consumption over which "*Santa Kloz*", you might say, is the patron saint. At the end of *Santa Kloz*, a skeleton pushes Santa, swinging him through the air, linking capitalism with death. "On my stage set, the department store backdrop is a wall filled with little picture frames (actually rhinestone belt buckles). I hung tiny pictures of President Bush, Santa and a skeleton.

"Really, though, this explanation aside, what I really love is making good puppet shows."

—Susan Schnur

To book a performance by Terror As Usual (there are many scripts, not just "*Santa*"), contact Jenny Romaine at: 315 W. 86th Street, Suite 4E, NYC 10024.

The script of "Santa Faints" *is from* Arbeter shul *[proletariat school], a Yiddish/Communist textbook published by the International Workers Order in New York in 1932, and unearthed from the YIVO Institute's archives by Jeffrey Shandler.*

Yiddish Narrator & Translator: Jeffrey Shandler; Accordianist: Alan Bern; Singer/English Narrator: Adrienne Cooper; Puppeteer/Director: Jenny Romaine.

THE DOCTORS' PLOT OF 1953

In light of the changes and chaos in today's Russia, it's interesting to take a look at Soviet-Jewish realities from forty years ago; collective paranoiac thinking can be hard to expunge....

A DAUGHTER REMEMBERS

By Natalya Rapoport

On January 13, 1953, the official press agency Tass announced the arrest of a group of "killer doctors" who were allegedly systematically doing away with prominent public figures in the Soviet Union. Nine doctors, six of them Jews, were cited, and in the next few weeks many more were carted off to the dread prisons of Lubyanka and Lefortovo.

The arrests of prominent physicians (mostly Jewish) created hysteria throughout the country. Clinics were empty, patients refused professional medical advice, rumors abounded of poisoned medicines in pharmacies and murdered infants in maternity wards. Public opinion, including rank anti-Semitism, was primed to accept the Doctors' Plot, and to this day no one knows how many hundreds or thousands of doctors, prominent and ordinary, were executed and victimized.

Here Natalya Rapoport, who was 14 years old when her father, a distinguished pathologist, was taken away, tells what it was like for her to have family and friends "disappear".

My mother was a physiologist. Most of her life she worked with Lina Stern, the pre-eminent woman academician in the Soviet Union.

Lina was talented, brilliant, and domineering, with a sharp tongue. I was afraid of her. She demanded that her colleagues match her own total dedication to work, but others, unlike Lina, had husbands, wives, children. Returning from wartime Siberian evacuation, my mother had trouble placing me in a kindergarten, so she took me along with her to the institute, deadly afraid that Lina would discover me.

I spent part of my childhood in a laboratory cupboard that was specially emptied for me to hide in whenever Lina entered. (Was it then that my interest in natural science was born?) Sitting there in shadowed silence, I listened to the laboratory sounds: the zzzhhh of an instrument recording the rhythms of frogs' heartbeats and muscular contractions; the clicking of thermostats; the shrill voice of Lina, swearing at her colleagues.

Lina and I were born on the same date, August 26, separated by sixty years. You can be sure, my mother always had to leave my birthday parties for Lina's: from my celebration, which my friends and I prepared all summer, with games, songs, and performances in which I was the star, to the dull old people whose life was almost behind them.

I was about ten years old when Lina suddenly disappeared from our lives. Vanished totally. My parents answered my questions in a very evasive way, and I didn't persist. Without Lina, my life became much better. Now my mother belonged to me completely; there was even a period of time when she didn't go to work. Of course I saw that my parents were terribly dispirited by Lina's disappearance, but at the bottom of my heart, secretly and shamefully, I relished the new situation. Now when I became ill, my mother was at my bedside; she read aloud to me from wonderful books and even played games with me. It was a joy to be sick!

But outside my protected life, unimaginable horrors were occurring. One after another of my parents' friends disappeared, and even in their own home my parents spoke their friends' names only in whispers.

January 13, 1953. I am fourteen. Oblivious, I am listening to the radio for the fifth time that day. I am accustomed to trusting it completely. Suddenly my brain refuses to comprehend what I hear. It just cannot be, it simply cannot be!

Dr. Vovsi, Miron Semyonovich Vovsi, whose gentle hands and radiant eyes had always been there throughout my childhood and my illnesses. And other doctors too. Many close friends of my family. They have turned out to be killers, monster-freaks of the human race, evildoers dressed in white coats, with but a single goal—to murder the devoted leaders of the Communist Party and the government.

. . . I had fainted so deeply that I didn't hear my parents return or my father being taken away. I regained consciousness much later, still in complete ignorance. Mama was kneeling next to me. A strange male voice asked:

"Is this your daughter?"

"Yes."

"Yours and the arrestee's?"

The arrestee? A powerful wave seized me, whirled me around, thrashing me, breaking my bones, and bearing me away forever from my rosy world, my happy childhood. I regained consciousness the second time as the daughter of a killer doctor.

In our apartment there is a search going on. Every book, page by page. Every pillow, every drawer. Here they find a letter from my friend Jan, whom I befriended in Estonia last summer. How could I have known that Jan's father was an imprisoned Estonian priest, an important leader of the Estonian church, and that my friendship with Jan would be one of the links in the chain of my father's criminal actions?

Now they've found several books by Freud. They leaf through them muttering, add them to the evidence. Suddenly, a sensation! In the medicine cabinet, among other harmless ampules, they find one with a skull and crossbones and the inscription "Poison." Here it is at last—the necessary, irrefutable evidence. Everybody looks at the discoverer with respect and envy.

"And how many is it possible to put to sleep with one such ampule?" asks the lieutenant, the only one in military uniform at the search.

"It is not possible to kill *anybody* with this ampule," my mother tries to explain. "This is medicine, atropine, a remedy for heart disease. My husband had a heart attack, and we keep medicines at home to be on the safe side."

"Oh yes, I understand, of course, what you keep it for," says the lieutenant venomously. "I understand what kind of heart medicine you have here. Just how many hearts were stopped with this medicine?" He is happy.

All my mother's attempts to explain are in vain. They call somebody by telephone, informing them of the find. (It is late at night, but *there* they never sleep.) They wrap the ampule carefully in cotton wool, seal it into a small box and insert that into yet another box, which is also sealed. They draw up a document stating that poison was found in the arrestee's apartment and demand that my

My father, Yakov Rapoport

Opposite page: My Mother and I, 1950

I, Natalya Rapoport, of the College of Engineering, University of Utah, 1990

mother sign it. She categorically refuses. They urge, then threaten her. If she doesn't sign, she will have to go with them. For a long time? Forever? I am in despair. But Mama doesn't sign.

The excited mood of our visitors associated with finding the ampule soon evaporates. There has been an accident: one man has cut his finger on a razor blade, and there's a drop of blood. This unlucky fellow has cut his finger in the home of a killer doctor: his days are numbered. He is sitting in a chair, paler than the walls, his wounded hand extended. His comrades circle around him and worriedly discuss the situation. What to do? Can he be saved?

Mama proposes an inventive solution. She brings the distraught man iodine. The tension now hits its apogee: should the iodine be applied or not? One volunteer with courage born of despair puts a drop of iodine on his nail. One after another, each man sniffs it. It is decided not to take the risk. They phone somewhere for a car and the suffering one is taken away—most likely to a special clinic where his scratch will be treated by a trusted, dependable *Russian* surgeon.

The search is over. They have sealed the apartment and have left us my room, the hallway, kitchen, washroom, and toilet. As they had warned, Mama was taken away. Neither she nor I knew if we would see one another again.

As it turned out, Mama returned just twenty-four hours later. She found me in the same chair in the hall, just as she had left me. I hadn't budged. I myself don't remember anything about those twenty-four hours except the heartbreaking howling of our dog Topsy. Most probably we were a duet.

With Mama, my life returned.

I was morbidly attached to my mother. In my childhood, when she would travel somewhere with Papa, I would simply fall ill, stop eating, vomit, and, it seemed to me, die until she returned. I would count the days, the hours, the minutes. I was prepared to do anything for my mother.

During the days after my father's arrest it was very important to my mother that my life not be disrupted and that I continue going to school. So I went. But two fears took over my life, two fears that merged into one uninterrupted horror: the daytime fear that my classmates would uncover my disgrace; and the nighttime fear that my mother would be taken away.

The nighttime fear began at eleven and lasted until five in the morning. For some reason, I was convinced that she couldn't be arrested earlier or later. My fear was so strong that during those hours I trembled all over as if in a fit; I even slept in the hall on a cot rather than in my room, listening tensely the whole night to sounds and rustlings on the staircase. The slamming of the elevator door on the nearby floors made me cry out in terror.

The daytime fear held me in its grip during school hours, turning me into a small compressed spring. Only three girls in my class knew my secret, three girls who lived in my apartment building. Their parents sternly forbade them to breathe a word, even to their closest friends, probably thinking that tomorrow any of them might share the same fate. And the girls were silent, although it's easy to imagine how difficult it was to keep such a sensational secret. The secret, desperate to come out, burned the ends of their tongues.

How did we live? My mother was fired the morning after my father's arrest. All the money in the house as well as our bonds and savings passbook were taken during the search. There was, I believe, some method in this. They wanted to see who would come to our aid and, following this thread, could haul in the whole evil chain to the very last link.

People understood this and were afraid. Encountering me in the street, neighbors averted their eyes, tried to slip by; they didn't recognize me. But not everyone. I will never forget our neighbors, Vladimir Nikolaevich and Nina Petrovna Beklemishev, from the old Russian intelligentsia. Vladimir was a tall, handsome man with a pointed beard, an academician who looked as if he had stepped out of the portraits of the great nineteenth-century scientists, aristocrats of the spirit. Whenever he'd meet Mama in the street, he didn't simply greet her, he bowed deeply to her, displaying to others a conspicuous example of courage and nobility.

His wife Nina bravely came to our apartment right after Papa's arrest and offered us money. My mother didn't accept it—there was no way she could ever pay it back—but Nina would not leave until she received Mama's solemn promise to turn to her for help the moment she needed it, day or night.

Once I met a close friend of my parents', Julia Moshkovsky, a historian and specialist in medieval Germany, in the street, and she took me to her apartment. She fed me, questioned me about everything, gave me extra food for Mama, and quickly sent me on my way. God forbid that her husband Shabsai should return from work and catch us—he would die of fear.

Julia's taking me to their home smacked of heroism and I admired her for it.

Soon the anxiety of being in school became too great, and I stopped going. Natashka Tomilina, a girl from our apartment building who was in my grade at school, would drop by. Before she had visited only rarely, now almost every day. She would take out the sandwich and apple from her school case: "Listen, eat up, huh? If my mother finds out I didn't eat lunch at school, she'll kill me."

Not once did she glance at the sealed doors or ask why I sat on a cot in the hallway—just a normal thing, after all, a person living in a hallway on a cot. Natashka took out her textbooks: "Listen, help me with

these physics problems. Look at the stupid stuff we studied today. Look."

To this day, Natashka claims that she did this without an ulterior motive: what kind of fool would rack her brains to solve those silly problems when there was a simpler, more elegant and reliable way—just have me do it.

She is most likely lying. She herself was an excellent student and could easily solve those "silly problems." But in any case, thanks to Natashka, I stayed abreast of school news, gossip, and the curriculum. When I returned to school I wasn't behind at all.

The classics also helped us to get through. There was a bookcase in the hall with the collected works of Tolstoy, Pushkin, Hugo. Mama took them to the bookstores, returning with bread, milk, and kasha. We survived. But the classics left our house in suspicious-looking, bulky sacks, and someone informed on us: Mama was selling things from behind the sealed doors. Again a search.

This time I almost died with fear. I thought they had come for Mama. They broke the intact seals, immediately saw that the accusation was false, but were obliged to verify everything from the beginning, according to the list. I took a fit, kicked and screamed. But they didn't take Mama. They sealed everything up again and left.

There was one family who helped us unfailingly throughout.

My mother had shared the same desk with Raya Guber in high school. The friendship that developed lasted their entire lives; they were closer than sisters. When I was born, my mother fell ill with typhus, and Aunt Raya breast-fed me along with her own Marishka, who had been born two months earlier. The Gubers were my second family.

What an attractive couple! Aunt Raya—diminutive, graceful, joyous; Andrey—tall, elegant, gray-eyed, inventor and soul of our childhood games: lapta, lotto, catch, he played them all enthusiastically. He was an art critic, a professor at Moscow University, a specialist in Renaissance art, and head curator of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Art. He was a wonderful raconteur with whom my father composed extraordinary duets of storytelling; with those cadences we grew up.

In those terrible days, Andrey sent Marishka to our house and ordered me to come to their home every day for dinner. My daily visits were a tremendous risk for the Gubers, the more so since they lived in a communal building where any tenant could inform on them. But the Gubers were beyond fear. They took me in each day, fed me, gave me food for Mama and packages for Papa. These trips I will never forget.

In our stairwell, in the street, in the courtyard, there were always MGB [Ministry of State Security] agents waiting to follow us. I could easily pick them out of a crowd—it wasn't at all difficult. Mama taught me how to lose them. I would go into the subway, get into a car, and stand close to a door. As the doors were closing, I quickly jumped out, hopped on a train coming in the opposite direction, and rode for two or three stations. On my way to the center of town, I would repeat the operation several times. I had to be absolutely sure I had lost them; otherwise I was supposed to return home.

"I had fainted so deeply that I didn't hear my father being taken away."

To go out into the street was torture for another reason as well. There were barrack-like tenements in our courtyard. The inhabitants of the barracks had already informed everyone around that my father had taken pus from cancerous corpses and rubbed it into the skin of healthy people.

The young boys from the barracks enthusiastically took it upon themselves to avenge my father's monstrous crimes, hurling at me everything they could get their hands on—rotten vegetables, dead mice and rats, and sometimes even cobblestones. No matter how humiliating it was, I had to turn tail and run; if I wasn't fast enough, I would get a beating.

One day in February 1953 my mother returned home looking like death: they hadn't accepted a package for my imprisoned father. "Don't bring any more, they are no longer necessary," said the MGB man on duty, looking at some list. He refused to answer Mama's questions. There could be only one explanation: Papa was no longer alive.

The days dragged on—bleak, empty, dark.

March 4, 1953. Stalin is ill. Mama can't tear herself away from the radio—tensely, eagerly she listens. Cheyne-Stokes breathing, the end is near. Mama is silent, waiting.

March 5, 1953. It is finished! Stalin is dead. For the first time, some kind of faint, uncertain light penetrates the black night of my mother's eyes. If only Papa were alive—so much could change now!

The 8th or 9th of March. A phone call. A male voice spoke: "I am calling at the request of the professor. The professor asked me to tell you that he is healthy, feels fine, and is concerned about his family. What should I say to the professor?" Do you understand? Not the murderer, not the monster, not the scum of the earth—but the *professor*. He is alive!

"We are fine," my mother almost screams. "Tell him we are fine, we are healthy, we are—happy!" (This was hardly an appropriate word to end a speech in those days of national mourning.)

He is alive! With my earth-shaking news I fly to the Gubers. They embrace me, cry with me, and Aunt Raya runs to the kitchen for cake. "For the wake," she awkwardly lies to the shocked neighbors. "We want to to remember Joseph Vissarionovich in the Russian tradition!" I fly back home with cake and treats for the great celebration.

He is still in the Hall of Columns. Yet even his *corpse* thirsts for new victims, as hundreds of onlookers are trampled to death in the crowd coming to view Stalin's body. But at our home there is a celebration.

For the first time in my life I feel my alienation piercingly and acutely, and I am conscious of it not as a child but as a grown-up. It is the beginning of my adulthood.

Now my mother and I live on hope. Mama again sends off packages.

Days and weeks pass. No news, no news.

Then late on the night of April 3rd, our dog Topsy suddenly goes wild. She starts running up and down the hallway, banging up against the sealed door of the dining room, then against the door to the stairwell, clearing my cot with a single bound. I'm in a panic: they're coming to arrest Mama!

The telephone rings. My father's voice: "My darlings, it's me! I'll be home in an instant. I'm calling from the telephone booth downstairs. I didn't want you to faint at my

NATALYA NOW

When LILITH set out to find Natalya Rapoport, the internationally known polymer chemical physicist, it was a surprise to discover that she lives not in Moscow, but in Salt Lake City. "I am happy here," says the 53-year-old professor who currently holds a research position at the University of Utah. "One of the first things I did in the States was join a synagogue. I feel I belong to something now. During my whole life in Russia I only felt that I didn't belong."

"I came on invitation to occupy a distinguished chair reserved for foreign scholars," she continues, "and for three months of work here I was paid—this is not an exaggeration—six times more salary than for 30 years of work in Russia at the Academy of Sciences!"

Rapoport, who has been in the States for three years, is involved in two research projects. One concerns targeted drug delivery (in Rapoport's words, "how to send medicines exactly where they should go in the body"); the other deals with artificial vision for blind people in which video cameras are put into eyeglasses, and electrical signals are then sent from the cameras to encapsulated electrode arrays implanted into the visual cortex.

Politics has wreaked geographical havoc with Rapoport's family. Her father remains in Russia ("He is 93," comments Rapoport. "Too old and too weak to move to the U.S."), her husband has finally been allowed to join his wife here in America after more than a year's separation, and the couple's 25-year-old daughter, Victoria, a well-known stage-set designer, lives newly in Israel. Russian authorities refused to grant Victoria a visa to America, even though she had won a scholarship to the New York Academy of Art. When she finally received permission to emigrate to Israel, next America twice denied her a visa, claiming that she had not spent enough time in Israel to prove that she would return there after receiving an American education.

It is clear that Natalya's noisy politics are the cause of Victoria's having been denied a visa from Russia to the U.S. In 1988, Natalya's memoir of the Doctor's Plot was the very first publication inside Russia to mention that gruesome episode of Soviet history. Natalya also spoke freely about Russian anti-Semitism to reporters from the B.B.C. and Voice of America. A founder (with Andrei Sakharov) of the most liberal political movement in Russia, Rapoport had "big hopes for democratization during the first years of perestroika. But," she adds, "by the time Sakharov died, I realized that all my efforts were gone to the sand. I lost hope. We applied for immigration then, because I feared a totalitarian coup during which time I'd go to prison and never see my daughter again."

"Anti-Semitism is a theme through my whole life", she continues. "For example, I had tried many times to go to International Congresses for chemistry. The authorities always refused to let me leave Russia." When Rapoport turned 50, she obtained permission for the first time to attend one of these symposia. Her sense of humor never abandoning her, she began her presentation (she was a featured speaker) with these words: "It seems I attend these International Conferences once every fifty years." The audience, savvy to her plight, applauded.

Back in Russia, Rapoport reports, she refused ever to stand in a food line. "It was too costly in hours," she says. "I told my husband, 'You have to choose. If I stand in line, we will have food but I will come home like a witch.' So my husband sometimes stood in the lines; me, never. Our meals were consequently very, very modest."

When LILITH last spoke with Rapoport she was just returning from a visit to Russia to see her father, bringing him suitcases full of food.

"I cried for 21 days over there. 2½ pounds of butter is 400 rubles – more than my father's monthly pension. He's too old to stand in lines. He has a group of old friends, they hunt for food every day in different places. He is starving, after all this life."

–Susan Schnur

sudden appearance."

After a minute, the doorbell rings. Papa! With him is a MGB colonel and the same lieutenant who had taken him away—now he carries Papa's little suitcase. The colonel says, "We return the professor to you." While the lieutenant removes the seals from the doors, the colonel telephones somewhere: "Comrade General, the professor has been delivered. There is much joy, many tears."

Six o'clock in the morning. The radio announces to all the world the end of the killer-doctor affair and the full rehabilitation of all the accused. The doorbell immediately rings; our neighbors the Beklemishevs, and behind them the Kaplans. From that moment on the door of our apartment never closes.

Everyone comes with a flower in hand! One by one, each gives a flower to Papa. I am crying. (Even now I am crying as I write these lines.) Then my schoolteachers come, asking when I'll return to school. I answer, "Tomorrow!"

Lord, what a day, what a celebration! Papa calls around to his friends; all of them are back home. Not all are yet able to move about or even to talk, but all are back home.

Life gradually returned to normal, and I was back at school. Studying was as natural to me as breathing. Soon my classmates' burning interest in me cooled, and my life became easier.

A little later, Lina Stern, my mother's domineering boss, re-entered our life, from prison and labor camp—as the sole survivor of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee—this at the age of about eighty. I became very close to her.

April 4th—the day of my father's return—became a traditional holiday in our family. In the first post-Stalin years, twenty-five to thirty survivors of the Doctors' Plot (those who had been imprisoned and others who had waited fearfully) gathered around our table on this day. Their number decreased gradually, as age took its toll; today only my father remains alive. Yet we continue to celebrate the day—the day of our family's rebirth.

This article was excerpted and adapted from Natalya's preface to The Doctors' Plot of 1953 *by Yakov Rapoport, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991. Used with permission of the publisher.*

EAST/WEST CULTURE CLASH
PFEFFERNUSSE MEETS IMAM BAYELDI

by Gloria L. Kirchheimer

In our Sephardic family, my marriage to an Ashkenazi was tantamount to an intermarriage—but still acceptable. For my parents and my husband's, it was a meeting of east and west—Near East and West Germany.

We spoke French and Ladino, they spoke German. When I was first engaged, my husband-to-be enjoyed nothing so much as parading me around his old Washington Heights neighborhood in New York and introducing me to his family's friends as his Spanish fiancee. That did not prevent their speaking to me in German despite the fact that I did not know one word. "Then you must learn," I was told, time and again.

My mother lost no time in bewitching her son-in-law with her tantalizing, alien cuisine. Vine leaves. Eggs cooked in coffee grounds. Herring smoked by setting it ablaze in a paper bag....To a man brought up on boiled potatoes every night of the week, who slathered whipped cream on everything, who ate a concoction called *himmel und erde* ("heaven and earth"—cooked apples and potatoes), and who dined on unadorned cold cuts every Sunday evening promptly at 5:45 (just after finishing *kaffe und kuchen*), it was a new world. He lost his soul to my mother's phyllo-baked cheese pastries, her sesame cookies and her *imam bayeldi* [literally "the priest fainted", a layered eggplant dish].

My mother was always prepared to feed at least ten people, day or night, no reservations required. Indeed our house was like a restaurant. People regularly appeared at the door, salivating in anticipation. On the other hand, my in-laws almost never had dinner guests. If you were invited at all, it was usually for 4 p.m. coffee and cake, served in exquisite Rosenthal china on an embroidered tablecloth set with silver spoons, my in-laws having been fortunate in escaping from Germany early enough to be able to bring their worldly goods. They adhered to this ritual every day of the week. (My father-in-law, a commercial artist, worked at home.)

Although I found the formality amusing at first, I learned to love the serenity and charm of the late afternoon break. My mother-in-law even changed her clothes for the event, looking as though she were about to step out to the opera. It couldn't have been more different from my mother's Mediterranean informality, her brightly colored dresses, her slippers and loosened girdle stays.

The differences between my in-laws and my family were particularly apparent the first time we invited both sets of parents over for Chanukah. It was decided that my mother would bring soup and leek patties and my mother-in-law her famous matzah balls—an historic collaboration like the Entente Cordiale, requiring several preliminary consultations in four languages.

As soon as my mother arrived she began stuffing my freezer with spinach pies, meat pastries and baklava which she claimed to have found, fortuitously, in her refrigerator. While my mother took over the kitchen, my mother-in-law retired to her domain—the Chanukah gift table, which she had planned out months in advance.

She filled elegant plastic plates, one for each participant, with miniature chocolate champagne bottles imbedded in rock candy, marzipan "cigars" and "strawberries", gold- and silver-wrapped cognac balls, and marzipan peasant figures with gold coins emerging from their rears. There were also bonbons ("bong-bongs" as my in-laws called them), jaw-breaking *pfeffernusse* and an orange on each plate (for simplicity).

Next my mother-in-law joined my mother in the kitchen and concentrated on dropping her matzah balls into the soup while my mother completed her leek patties. My mother-in-law's matzah balls were famous as a result of a graveside battle in which a relative accused my mother-in-law not only of stealing the jewelry of the deceased but also her matzah ball recipe. My husband, in his most pensive moments of existentially discussing life and death, often spoke of the necessity of writing down this recipe.

Despite a minor contretemps between the two women over whether or not the soup pot should remain covered, the dinner was marked by a lively discussion of Hebrew pronunciation—*they* said Oh-Maine, *we* said Ah-men—as well as polite appreciation for the other's culture. Perhaps I was the only one to notice that none of us (except my husband) actually ventured across that cultural divide to eat from the others' cuisine.

LEEK PATTIES

Emilie de Vidas Levy

Leeks, 5-6 stalks

1 1/2 lbs. chopped beef

2 eggs, beaten

Matzah meal or flour for breading

1/2 cup tomato juice

Oil for frying (corn or safflower oil)

2 cups water

Salt and pepper to taste

Trim leeks, cut into ringlets and wash thoroughly, discarding tough parts. Boil leeks in water until tender.

Drain and mix with chopped meat. Add eggs and blend well. Add salt and pepper.

Heat oil in 10-inch frying pan. Shape meat mixture into small patties. Dip in matzah meal or flour and fry on both sides. Drain on paper towels.

Place patties in shallow pan. Cook for 10 minutes in tomato juice. Serves 6-8.

(Reprinted with permission from Sephardic Cookery: Traditional Recipes for a Joyful Table, *by Emilie de Vidas Levy. New York: Women's Division, Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America, 1983*

Gloria L. Kirchheimer is a short story writer whose work has been anthologized in The Tribe of Dina *(Beacon Press) and* Shaking Eve's Tree *(Jewish Publication Society).*

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AND VASHTI REFUSED

(Continued from page 36)

models and activities which my biological family offered me were not necessarily what I valued, so I say also that even though Abraham, David and Hosea are central figures in the Bible, they are not central for me.

In bringing Vashti's story from the margin to the center, in re-writing her story in our actions today, we thus use the Bible as a resource of moral agency, of making justice. Instead of looking to the Bible for answers that can be copied to solve today's problems, our confrontation with the Bible becomes a model for confronting the moral dilemmas we face in our own lives today.

People like myself do not expect life's normal course of events to be sustaining and nurturing. We know that solutions to social problems are rarely found in the official word, but can be constructed out of lifting up (and listening for) the silenced word.

The story of Vashti, then, has been re-written many times. It was re-written when an underground railroad, and not complacency, was the response to a people's ignored cry for freedom; it was rewritten when a boycott, and not further obedience, was the response to the arrest of a tired woman who dared sit down on the wrong seat of a bus; it was rewritten when a few lesbians and gay men finally did not go gently into that ever-waiting paddy wagon outside the barroom door, but staged the Stonewall Rebellion—the founding event of today's lesbian/gay movement.

The story of Vashti is rewritten in the hearing, the taking to heart, and the changes wrought when those who by saying "no" give us the power to say "yes." We cannot predict when such a voice will speak, or when it will have the power to start a movement, raise consciousness, or change our lives. We only know that the voices usually come from the margins, from those desperate enough to see clearly.

We can place ourselves in their midst, listening to the voices that come not from on high, but from below and outside. □

Gary David Comstock is the Protestant Chaplain at Wesleyan University, where he is also a Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion, teaching courses in social ethics and lesbian/gay theologies. His book, Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men, *was published in 1991 (Columbia University Press).*

CHILDREN WITH A STAR: JEWISH YOUTH IN NAZI EUROPE

by Deborah Dwork; Yale University Press, $25.00

CHILDREN OF THE FLAMES: DR. JOSEF MENGELE AND THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE TWINS OF AUSCHWITZ

by Lucette Matalon Lagnado and Sheila Cohn Dekel; William Morrow and Co., 256 pp., $20

Even as the Holocaust recedes further into the past and the witnesses of its horrors age, new memoirs continue to be published, as if with increased urgency. This year, a relatively untold story has been receiving special attention: the plight of the youngest victims, Jewish children during the years 1939–45. At the First International Gathering of Children Hidden During World War II [LILITH, Fall 1991], some 1600 men and women gathered in Manhattan to share memories and explore the special circumstances of their survival. In light of that event, the publication of two new books seems especially timely: *Children With a Star* by Deborah Dwork, which covers the lives of children through all the phases of the war against the Jews; and *Children of the Flames* by Lucette Matalon Lagnado and Sheila Cohn Dekel, which focuses on one chilling chapter of that nightmare world.

It was a world where being young only compounded the crime of being Jewish, for once in the clutches of the Nazis, children—like the elderly and ailing—were exterminated immediately, together with their mothers. One and one half million Jewish children perished during these years; only eleven and a half percent survived. The wholesale death of these children, writes Deborah Dwork, "uniquely clarifies...the horror and evil of the Nazi genocide of adults." When a six-month-old infant is tossed into the flames, all questions of blame, all rationalizations and stereotypes are seen for what they are: irrelevant and obscene.

Dwork has written an excellent, well-researched book about how the war years affected children and childlife in all its guises and locales. Though its subject is grim and its tragic outcome all too familiar, the book is fresh and compelling—both psychologically and historically. The author stresses that her book is not about how the Nazi system sought to extinguish child life but rather about the daily existence of children until their escape, liberation or death. What did they do all day—in the ghettos, in the transit camps? What were their hopes and nightmares?

During the war years, the Germans methodically isolated the Jewish community from the outside world, harassing and terrorizing Jews before annihilating them completely. Dwork documents how each stage of the Nazi stranglehold was viewed from the perspective of the children: how children felt as they were cut off from friends, classmates and familiar sources of pleasure, such as sports events, parks, cinemas, libraries and ice-cream parlors; their initial feelings of shame; and how those from assimilated homes reacted to the new all-Jewish schools and teachers (usually with curiosity or excitement).

When it became clear that even a severely limited life would not be permitted, parents with no way out themselves attempted to save their children by hiding them with non-Jews. Dwork describes the various kinds of arrangements that were made and how the underground networks operated. This chapter, including eyewitness accounts of both children and rescuers, is particularly engrossing. The author notes that most of the people involved in the underground activities were quite young and many were women. Today, these rescuers (who refuse to see themselves as heroes) speculate that the fact that they did not have children themselves probably enabled them to do such work. Over and over again, these young men and women witnessed wrenching scenes of parents handing over their children to complete strangers with the knowledge that they might never see them again; older people, they say today, who better understood the intensity of the parent-child relationship, might not have been able to go on with it.

Most of the Jewish children who survived the war were hidden in some fashion. Some of them were hiding and visible—that is, they passed as Christians—and some were hiding and hidden. Some children were hidden along with other members of their family, while others were adopted by other families or placed in convents. Unquestionably, these were the lucky ones, which is one reason many of them have kept silent over the years. The tragedy at center-stage was so overwhelming, so inexplicable, so horrible, that it may have taken half a century to digest. The stories of hidden children, however pervaded with loss and pain, still have a human and moral dimension: There are saviors, good and evil foster parents, some happy endings. But mostly, these are not easy stories, and that is the other reason the survivors suppressed them for so long. Severed from loving homes, set into alien cultures, living daily with the tension of pretending and the fear of discovery, these children were severely traumatized.

The children who were not hidden proceeded to the transit camps and ghettos. Despite the misery surrounding them, they were able to find pleasure in small moments—secret lessons, for example. Dwork relates the desperate attempts of the leaders of "work" ghettos to train children over 10 to do adult factory work. Listing a child as part of the labor force was the only way to save him or her from the Nazi death machine. For the very young, there was no hope.

The book ends with the death and slave camps. Those young in years who entered that horrifying world had surely shed all vestiges of childhood by now. For most of them, this was the end of the line. Yet it is right here, in the shadow of the crematoria, that Lagnado and Dekel's book begins. At the gates of Auschwitz, children and their mothers were automatically directed to the gas chambers—except if Josef Mengele, the impeccably dressed doctor who supervised the selections, wanted them for his medical experiments. Mengele was particularly fascinated by twins and, two by two, he plucked his specimens out of the jaws of death.

Children of the Flames lacks the historical overview and insights of *Children With a Star*. It is an emotional outpouring, consisting of the oral histories of twins who survived, interspersed with a quasi-biographical account of Mengele. The book's novelistic technique—which presents Mengele as a character and ascribes thoughts and motives to him—seems ill-advised from the standpoints of psychology and taste. Considering the survivors' admitted obsession with him (one survivor insists that he loved children), the narrative is disturbing.

In the end, it is the heart-rending voices of these child witnesses, both in this book and in Dwork's, with which one is left. It is a twisted tale they tell, but those who lived it must tell it, and we must listen.

—Sara Brzowsky

GLORIA GOES TO GAY PRIDE

by Lesléa Newman, illustrated by Russell Crocker; Alyson Publications, 1991, $7.95

Among the holidays that Gloria—who seems to be about five—celebrates are Halloween, Chanukah, and Gay Pride Day. Her Mama Grace holds a sign at the gay parade that says, "Gay Nurse Healing the Earth"; her Mama Rose's sign proclaims, "Gay Mechanic Healing the Planet"; and Gloria's own sigh (which she) has made herself, declares, "I Love My Mommies." Marching in the parade are lots of people Gloria knows—her female mail carrier, male music teacher, and Richard, a nurse who works with Mama Grace. There are also spectators who "aren't singing or clapping," and whose signs say, "Gays Go Away."

"Why do they want us to go away?" Gloria asks, and the answer informs all of us.

A tender book for pre-schoolers (of heterosexual parents, too) about love, choice and freedom.

—Susan Schnur

AHEAD OF TIME

by Ruth Gruber; Wynwood Press, 1991, $19.95

Add unpretentiousness to the characteristics that distinguish some seasoned journalists from others. In a captivating memoir of her early professional years, veteran foreign correspondent Ruth Gruber skillfully sails through an astonishing odyssey with ease and humility.

Gruber's achievements are woven into a riveting autobiography, set during the Depression era 1930's. Postponing marriage and babies before it was socially acceptable, this young Jewish woman embarks on a series of journeys that culminate in a doctorate from—of all places—Germany. She is referred to in press accounts as "the youngest Ph.D. in the world." It is the identification with her Jewish heritage, however, that is most poignant. Anti-Semitism rears its ugly head not only in Nazi Germany, where Gruber witnesses the ominous signs of impending doom, but also in the midst of her insulated studies in Wisconsin. Most affecting of all is Gruber's visit with family in a Polish *shtetl*. The meeting is brief, under duress from local authorities. It provides Gruber's closest brush with that era's brutality as she laments the inevitable loss of her relatives to the Holocaust.

Her notoriety earned her an unprecedented sojourn to the Soviet Arctic as the first American and female journalist during Stalinist Russia. A second excursion delivers her to the labor camps of Siberia where broken spirits and unspoken words provide her with insight into what we now know to be the Gulag.

Gruber's pioneering efforts are a stunning tribute to self-determination—a reaffirmation of female competence in a man's environment.

—Randi Locke

ISSUES OF BLOOD: THE POLITICS OF MENSTRUATION

by Sophie Laws; Macmillan, 1990

Sophie Laws' *Issues of Blood* asks some important questions: Why do women feel ashamed of menstruation? Why do we maintain our silence, removing it from public discourse? And why are new products endlessly developed to enable the secrecy to be ever more effective, while at the same time adding bleaches and perfumes to sanitize the natural and convince us that we are unclean and foul-smelling?

Laws interviewed 14 white, Christian males in Great Britian between the ages of 21 and 40. While her sample is admittedly tiny, her premise as a sociologist is that "the ideas of a dominant group in a society are those which will dominate, and therefore to some extent determine, the ideas of the oppressed." Her second, feminist, premise is that "ours is still a male-dominated society in which men act as a group to maintain their superiority." Laws concludes that male ideas about menstruation are "likely to dominate the ideas women have about themselves as well as about the social world."

Then there are the male jokes about "that time of the month." In many, the punchline implies that if a woman is sexually off-limits because of pain or reluctance, she should be temporarily replaced, as if lack of sexual availability renders her useless. Furthermore, men's jokes about "being on the rag" are used to humiliate us, to make us self-conscious, vulnerable and insecure.

But it is one particular group of men who are targeted by Laws for misogynist ideas—doctors. "The ideology they promote is one which defines woman primarily as a child-bearing creature. Menstruation is not felt to be a natural event, and on the whole they are uninterested to the point of hostility in menstrual problems." Some blame mothers for making their daughters "neurotic," or for indulging them. Others believe that we exaggerate pain to manipulate male co-workers and family members to our advantage. Still others label the complaints psychosomatic and prescribe tranquilizers and anti-depressants as antidotes.

Another cure-all, the orgasm, has come into recent vogue, says Laws, as if all women need is more sex to cure pre-menstrual and menstrual discomfort and tension. "Women who want to refuse the old order of menstrual secrecy are offered a new system where menstruation may be openly acknowledged within a heterosexual relationship. Women wanting freedom to determine their own sexuality find their demands reinterpreted as a desire for sex during periods."

Thus, we still have our work cut out for us: to challenge the notions that women have been "cursed," punished for the crime of having been born impure, a.k.a. female.

—Eleanor J. Bader

BIBLE HEROES I CAN BE

by Anne Eisenberg, illustrated by Rosalyn Schanzer; Kar-Ben Copies, 1990; Ages 2-6

Noah, Abraham, Sara, Rebecca, Joseph, Miriam, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, Naomi, King David, and King Solomon are presented in this delightful simple book, which distills the essential actions and qualities of our biblical ancestors, matching them to the daily experiences and imaginative play of a young girl. Each comparison is made in a few well- chosen words and the text stays close to the self-referential point of view of the child, making this a book that can be listened to eagerly and repeatedly by any very young child who has ever wished to emulate the important grown-ups in her life, regardless of whether she is familiar with these particular characters.

Pleasing, colorful illustrations amplify each vignette. In a light-handed and appropriate way, this book gives us a taste of that which has attracted readers to the Bible throughout the ages.

—Naomi Danis

DAUGHTERS OF THE SHTETL: LIFE AND LABOR IN THE IMMIGRANT GENERATION

by Susan A. Glenn; Cornell University Press, 1990, $29.95

My grandmother is not like other grandmothers. A self-made intellectual and activist with an idealistic vision beyond her times, she is so outraged by social injustice and forthright in her opinions that I cannot imagine a revolution big enough to contain her. She says I should have known her mother, my great-grandmother. "Now that was a real woman," she says. My grandmother and great-grandmother are part of a remarkable group of women who, during a turbulent time of change

(Continued on page 30)

INTERMARRIAGE

Susan Weidman Schneider

For nearly 375,000 couples throughout the U.S., religious intermarriage–in most cases, between Christians and Jews–is a fact of life. While many of those "marrying out" a generation ago sought religious anonymity, today ethnic pride and intermarriage can go hand-in-hand. A comprehensive and sensitive look at the realities of marriage for many men and women today. For an autographed copy, send $19.95 plus $3 postage and handling to LILITH 250 West 57th St., Suite #2432 N.Y., N.Y. 10107.

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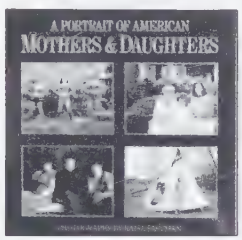

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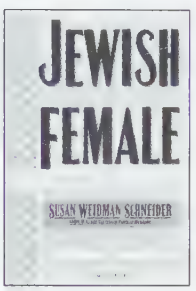

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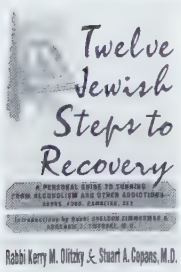

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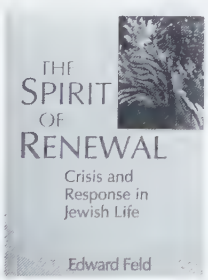

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Sima Elizabeth Shefrin

in urban America, struggled to construct a female identity as rooted in the Old World as it was in the New.

Susan Glenn's *Daughters of the Shtetl* rescues these women from the oblivion of fading family anecdote. She brings their lives into focus in the context of familial and societal factors that shaped them, both in the *shtetl* and in the American city. Her book concentrates on women in the garment industry, who formed a majority of the workforce and lent fierce support to the union movement. As these women changed within themselves, they transformed the world around them, played critical roles in organizing labor from 1900 to 1930, and yet received little recognition for their efforts.

Glenn takes pains to defy simplistic analysis. She opens with a discussion of women's lives in Eastern Europe and how mothers and daughters of the immigrant generations adapted differently to American life. She then considers work opportunities and labor conditions in the garment industry, describing the rich social and cultural worlds that arose in factories and sweatshops. The book crescendos with the chapter "Uprisings: Women and the Mass Strike Movement," where Glenn captures the risk-taking and suspense as well as the colorful characters involved in labor's first attempts to organize.

Throughout, Glenn reinforces her principal thesis tha immigrant women's new identity—or "new womanhood"—drew sustenance from both Old and New World perceptions of women, and was often in flux between the two. In the *shtetl*, women were considered to be beneath men, yet achieved high status as breadwinners. In America, women were idealized for their feminine qualities, but expected not to work outside the home. The immigrant generations derived positive strength from both cultural perceptions of women. In formulating a "new womanhood," they learned to take pride in their work without seeing themselves as inferior to men. These women often showed greater determination than more Americanized later generations, who settled into the cult of domesticity. Glenn quotes a former garment worker born in Poland: "My husband considered me aggressive and so does my daughter." Yet she insists, "Only through aggressiveness am I protected."

While unwilling to accept inferior status, Russian Jewish women did not see themselves as "morally superior" to men as did early American feminists, who believed in a unity among all women that overrode class and ethnic lines. This separatist notion of a sisterhood did not appeal to Jewish women who yearned to participate in a world of men, a realm closed to them in the *shtetl*. They saw themselves as neither superior nor inferior to men, but as partners in a common struggle for justice and dignity.

This struggle had its roots in the *shtetl*. There, socialism captured the imaginations of young people as an alternative to reality. Long before they came to America, many Russian Jews had grown familiar with the tension between old and new ideas.

These internal conflicts continued in America during the initial stages of the labor movement, though, as Glenn points out, the Orthodox and socialist sectors often overcame their differences and joined forces in the struggle for just and humane working conditions. She gives an example of the militant kosher meat boycott by immigrant mothers on New York's Lower East Side in 1902. "Their language and tactics were radical and extremely violent, and their cause was supported by the leaders of the garment workers' union and by both the socialist and the Orthodox Jewish press."

Unlike other immigrant groups except the Irish, many Jewish daughters came alone to the United States and worked to earn enough to bring their families. Most Jewish female workers in the garment industry were highly skilled and ambitious, not passive low-skilled laborers. Glenn explains in unbiased cultural and economic terms why Jewish female garment workers embraced activism, while their Italian counterparts rejected it in the initial stages of unionizing. Glenn succeeds in presenting the complexities behind the stereotypes of Jewish women as militant and Italian women as servile.

Despite their ambitions, Jewish women had a romantic domestic image of themselves that conflicted with their personal non-domestic selves. Their aspirations at work and at home clashed. While they struggled to achieve high status in the workplace and union, many dreamed of marrying and staying home to raise a family. When they married, even the most successful women leaders, such as Dorothy Jacobs and Bessie Abramovitz, abandoned their hard-earned status for the domestic life idealized in America.

Glenn adds the new dimension of gender to previous studies of immigrants that stress the importance of socialist thought and the influence of men, but ignore women's crucial participation in this period. She captures the fluidity and complexity of Jewish women's evolving identity during the early decades of this century. Heroic, radical, romantic and traditional, this unsettled generation of women left its mark on Jewish women today who struggle with traditional and modern aspects of their identities.

A dense academic study—the endnotes alone make up one-fifth of the pages—Glenn's book is at times dry, suffering from the lifeless verbs and repetition that afflict many academic studies. Yet, it is often entertaining with sprinklings of first-hand anecdotes, poems, songs and good storytelling. More importantly, she offers an invaluable analysis that roots in a richer, broader context the inspiring personalities we have understood only through anecdote.

—Alison Gardy

DID YOU KNOW THAT A WOMAN WAS A REBBE?

The Maid of Ludomir [Hannah Rachel Werbermacher, 1805–1892] was a famous rebbe in the Ukraine who taught Torah to her Chassidim through a half-open door, as men learning from a woman would not allow themselves to see her.

This excerpt, from Lawrence Kushner's *God Was In This Place and I, i did Not Know* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991), is about the Maid's daily wrestling match with holiness, constraints and defiance:

When Hannah Rachel Werbermacher finished her morning prayers, she would look at her left hand, wrapped in the bands of her tefillin. It was a black leather cube, two inches square, containing four passages from the Torah and held in position just above her biceps by a black leather strap. This in turn was spiraled around her forearm and wrist, and then plaited around the palm of her hand and between her fingers so that it spelled the Name of God. According to tradition, this act of loving service was reserved for men. Women were forbidden to wear the boxes. Yet there before her very eyes was her defiant hand, swaddled, bridled, and subdued by the black leather straps. Now her left side and all its defiance was ready to re-direct its energy in holy ways. Now this "other side" was no longer her foil but a mighty companion. Sometimes she would even inconspicuously kiss her hand before removing the square, black box.

A PORTRAIT OF AMERICAN MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

by Raisa Fastman, NewSage Press, $22.95 (softcover)

Raisa Fastman's new book of photographs, *A Portrait of American Mothers and Daughters* is a classic. Here are two excerpts:

When I was six or seven, in the Vienna of my childhood, my parents often left in the early evening for a night at the opera, the concert, or the theatre. My mother would come into the children's room to kiss us goodnight. As she leaned over me, I would be enveloped by her perfume, her strand of pearls would brush my face, and I would look up at her in admiration, and wonder: Would I ever grow up to be a beautiful, elegant woman like my mother.

Some years ago, my mother, now in her 90s, visited me for a while. I was invited to a party one evening, and before leaving I went to the guest room to wish her goodnight. As I bent over her bed to kiss her, she looked up at me and said, "You look so beautiful, and you smell so good," and I saw my strand of pearls brush her cheek.

—Elly Sherman

In this second excerpt, Mora Rothenberg, 22 (pictured here, left, with her mother and sister), muses on having a beautiful mother:

A woman came up and said, 'Excuse me, I couldn't help but notice that you are mother and daughter.' Oh, dangerous joy! People used to often tell us that we looked like each other. My mother would say that she felt complimented by it; but for me, it was both a pride and a burden, for I thought she was beautiful. When we were asked to pose for a photograph, it seemed like an affirmation and an extension of the bond between us. It was a tangible way of expressing it to others; of seeing it captured for ourselves...Not a day passes when I don't wish I could talk to her about my life since she died, to ask her things I still don't know the answers to. Yet some things I know she felt without her ever having told me. I'll bet that if I asked her now, she'd remember the smile that passed between us when a complete stranger recognized the way that we were related.

—Mora Rothenberg

RACHEL'S DAUGHTERS: NEWLY ORTHODOX JEWISH WOMEN

by Debra Renee Kaufman; Rutgers University Press, $30; paper, $11.95

Debra Kaufman, a professor of sociology and a feminist, wanted to know what attracts young, relatively affluent, well- educated and highly assimilated women to the most traditional, right-wing, patriarchal and fundamentalist branch of Judaism—often assumed to be oppressive to women. For her comprehensive study of *ba'alot teshuva*—Hebrew for women who have "returned" to Orthodox Judaism—the author interviewed 150 newly Orthodox Jewish women across the United States

The women in this study express and defend their status as women admirably. Like some feminists, these newly Orthodox Jewish women are women-identified, celebrating the female and women's life-cycle experiences. They avoid feminist politics by choosing to enhance the status of women and to protect women as a group within the boundaries of patriarchal religion.

Almost all the women in the study speak positively of the family purity laws [a two-week sexual separation between husband and wife during the woman's monthly menstrual cycle]. Many claim increased sexual satisfaction and pleasure within the marriage. Newly married women were more likely to complain about sexual separation, as compared to those married for a longer time, who found the laws quite positive when viewed over the adult life cycle.

Says Kaufman, "While religious orthodoxy may not provide the answers for most of us, these women have raised important questions about the meaning of family, the politics of gender identity, and feminism in the closing decades of the twentieth century". Their stories, and those of other "born again" women, reveal more than the antipathy of an antifeminist right. Their voices are the voices of women trying to cope with what they perceive to be the inequities and imbalances of post-industrial living and liberal patriarchal culture.

—Molly Abramowitz

Randi Locke is the program coordinator for social action projects of the Union of American Congregations. Eleanor J. Bader is a freelance writer and teacher in New York. Sara Brzowsky is a senior editor at Parade *magazine. Alison Gardy has had articles appear in* The New York Times. *Molly Abramowitz, a senior government writer, lives in the Washington, D.C. area.*

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LETTERS

(continued from page 2)

remembered an ancient time in our lives when we as women knew the female Spirit and worshipped her. This is Judaism, now, to me.

Finding the process of change too painfully slow in mainstream Judaism, I have found a place where I, as a Jewish woman, can cooperate with other Jewish women in creating and *unearthing* this heightened ancient experience. A non-sexist liturgy is not enough for me, as a Jew. I need those women who came before me to be acknowledged, worshiped, heard. Perhaps if the female experience were addressed, the Goddess recognized, young Jewish women would return.

Nancy Winternight-Selkowitz
Rosendale, NY

JEWISH LIFE IN WOMEN'S PRISONS

I serve as a chaplain to all the Jewish inmates incarcerated in the 10 Arizona State Prisons. Please send me one subscription to LILITH.

The women were excited to discover your magazine and requested that I write to see if you donate subscriptions to prisoners. Unfortunately, we have no budget, except when a rare donation is made. Of course, the magazine would be shared and kept in their library so that everyone could read it.

Rabbi Ayla Grafstein
Phoenix, AZ

I gave my copy of *Lilith* to the ladies at the women's correctional facility in Alderson, West Virginia, when I had a seder with them. Please send them a gift subscription, and bill me. Thanks so much!

Gershon Winkler
Moorefield, WV

HOMOSEXUAL JEWS IN MAINSTREAM SHULS

Christie Balka, in her article, "In Search of the Ideal Shul" [Fall 1991] suggests that it is unusual for a synagogue to be responsive to the concerns of homosexual Jews.

In response to the recognition that gay and lesbian Jews often feel distanced from and/or disenfranchised by the mainstream Jewish community, the Women's Issues Committee of the Houston Chapter of the American Jewish Committee organized a Jewish Community Dialogue on Lesbian and Gay issues in the fall of 1991.

The objectives of the program were to educate, to provide a safe forum for dialogue, to break down barriers and to build bridges. The interest in and need for the dialogue were evidenced by the broad-based community support given by the 21 agencies, Jewish organizations and synagogues which co-sponsored the event. Their sponsorship and participation ensured wide-spread publicity, gave mainstream sanction and legitimacy to

the topics, created an atmosphere that was safe and non-threatening.

Over 100 people attended the Sunday afternoon program—gays, straights, males and females, parents, friends and members of the general community. Many who attended had not been part of the Jewish community for years.

Andy Rose, co-editor with Christie Balka of *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish*, keynoted the program.

A panel consisting of a rabbi of a Reform congregation, a mother of a gay man, the father of a lesbian, a gay man and a lesbian addressed a variety of issues. The parents spoke movingly of their love for and acceptance of their children and their children's friends. The rabbi's talk generated a great deal of discussion concerning issues of *halacha*, of full synagogue participation, of commitment ceremonies. Workshops followed, at which anger, compassion and a heightened sense of understanding were some of the feelings evoked.

With a belief in and a commitment to *Klal Yisrael*, the organizers brought the Jewish community closer to inclusion and oneness. The process can be replicated elsewhere. For further information, contact Women's Issue Committee, American Jewish Committee, 3336 Richmond, Suite 303, Houston, Texas 77098.

Susie Askanase, Sandra J. Block, Rhoda Goldberg
Houston, TX

KOL ISHAH

(continued from page 7)

agencies in Denver has taken an unflinching look at violence in Jewish families and has created programs to counter its devastation.

The Jewish Professional Women's Group and the Allied Jewish Federation of Denver began a process two years ago that established a taskforce on domestic violence within the Jewish community. Both the process and its results can serve as a models for such projects nationwide.

An initial organizational meeting drew broad representation from medical doctors, representatives from the local Jewish hospital (Rose Medical Center), psychologists, the assistant district attorney in charge of child abuse cases (a Jewish woman), social workers, delegates from Jewish Family Services, and volunteers. Dr. Lenore Walker, a clinical psychologist and expert on domestic violence involved in the taskforce from the outset, says that the cross-disciplinary nature of the group was one of its greatest strengths. Cherie Kirschbaum, Robyn Loup and Marlin Barad, women involved in various local Jewish organizations, volunteered to co-chair the taskforce, which received administrative support from the Federation.

According to Walker, the taskforce organizers felt that "if we didn't have support of the Rabbinical Council and Federation, we wouldn't have the same impact on the Jewish community. We struggled to keep their support and keep peace."

As their first order of business, the participants educated themselves on the issues of domestic violence in society, and in the Jewish family in particular, through a six-month series of presentations on the medical, legal, and social aspects of the crisis. "Our sharpest criticism has been that we could have spent less time educating ourselves and planned something sooner. But we knew we were a model, and we didn't have others to follow, so we were hesitant," Walker explained. What emerged as the highest hurdle to immediate action, she said, was the lack of educated and trained volunteers to manage any of the programs the taskforce could establish.

In light of these limitations, the taskforce decided to hold a one-day conference on domestic violence in Jewish families for the general public last October. Doctors involved in the taskforce arranged funding support from the Rose Hospital Foundation. "The conference met [the hospital's] needs because they wanted their doctors educated [about domestic violence]," according to Walker. "And we wanted to be able to utilize the Jewish professionals in the area and to make them visible to the community." Denver's involvement of medical professionals is especially significant because, according to Barbara Harris, Jewish women tend to keep their abuse hidden from their doctors and therapists, who, in turn, are less likely to ask a woman directly about violence at home if she is from a middle- or upper-income family.

Over 300 men and women, including survivors of abuse, attended Denver's Sunday-morning conference, far more than expected. Walker gave the keynote address and then the delegates broke into groups, each of which was led by six facilitators, including a rabbi, an educator, a lawyer, a mental health professional, a volunteer advocate, and a doctor. According to Walker, the conference was a huge success, introducing the community to experts to whom they could turn for help.

The taskforce, now under the leadership of Henny Kaufmann, is planning a drop-in center, which will provide space for once-a-week rap sessions, education, access to resource materials and networking. Also in progress is the training of a volunteer corps to run a "warmline," operated through Jewish Family Services, to provide not crisis intervention (as a hotline would), but rather information and resources. The taskforce intends to train both lay advocates and rabbis to recognize and help high-risk families. The group persuaded several Denver rabbis to give a High Holy Day sermon on the topic of domestic violence.

While both men and women attended the conference, Walker reports that the rabbis were the only men who came to taskforce meetings regularly. "Women were willing to stick with it; most of the men were not," she said. "In general, it's more difficult for men than women to focus on the issue of domestic violence. It's a gender issue, because men are usually the perpetrators, women and children usually the victims. It is, therefore, of greater urgency and value to women. For men to challenge other men is going to take a shift in societal values, which is really the goal of a taskforce like this, to become the conscience of the Jewish community."

—Lainie Blum-Cogan

JEWISH WOMEN TEND TO KEEP THEIR ABUSE HIDDEN FROM THEIR DOCTORS AND THERAPISTS

World Union of Jewish Students

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The first international Jewish students' seminar for women activists! WUJS will bring to Israel in July 1992 20 female Jewish campus leaders for an intensive month of workshops and trips exploring women's issues in the Jewish world. Applications now available.

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PO Box 7914 , Jerusalem 91077 Israel

Fax: 972-2-610-741

Hands on the Future seminar sponsored by the Joint Program for Jewish Education of the State of Israel-Ministry of Education and Culture and the World Zionist Organization.

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USE THE SUBSCRIPTION FORM BOUND INTO THIS ISSUE TO GIVE LILITH AS A GIFT TO YOUR

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ACUPUNCTURIST,
DOCTOR,
LAWYER,
TEACHER,
BABYSITTER,
LOVER,
AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT OTHERS.

SEE

Women in traditional Sephardic costume in brilliant color and intricate decorative patterns are portrayed in "A Magnificence of Dress: Watercolor paintings by Anita Kushner," at *Yeshiva University Museum, 500 West 185th Street, New York, NY 10033.*

The Child Behind the Eyes is a monodrama by Israeli author Nava Semel, portraying the mother of a child with Down's Syndrome. Originally produced by the Haifa Municipal Theatre, this one-woman performance, starring actress Amy Brentano, accompanied by a post-performance discussion with the playwright, is currently touring the US. To schedule a performance

contact *Sesil Lissberger, Jewish Community Centers Association Lecture Bureau, (212) 532-4949.*

The Summer of Aviya, starring Gila Almagor in a solo performance based on her semi-autobiographical book, will be on tour in the Midwest as part of the Mid East/West Fest. The play dramatizes the difficult summer experienced by a ten-year-old girl and her mentally ill Holocaust survivor mother during a brief season when they live together *(See LILITH Spring 1991)* For information on a performance near you, write for a brochure to *William Behrer, The America -Israel Friendship League, 134 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016, or call him at (212) 213-8630, or call Sylvia Kaufman at (616) 722-6681.*

LILITH
Film star Gila Almagor emerges from her mother's troubled past
Why fame eluded I.B. Singer's sister
Roads to recovery: 12 new steps for women

CONNECT

Join in a celebration of Jewish women's diversity. Participate in a day of worshops, study, happenings and ceremony at the second annual *Timbrels of Miriam Conference* to be held on International Woman's Day, March 8 at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. Contact: *Professor Miriyam Glazer, (213) 476-9777, x 246.*

Can we talk? Native English speakers are needed to practice phone conversation skills with English- proficient Soviet Jewish emigres, by calling and conversing three times weekly for a minimum of three months. Call: *Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, (212)582-9100, extension 232.*

Rosh Chodesh /New Moon Celebrations for Jewish women are held at New York's gay and lesbian synagogue: *Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, 57 Bethune St., NY, NY 10014, (212) 929-9498.*

For your next trip to Israel, plan to encounter some of the many artists and cultural institutions described in *The Directory of Arts & Culture in Israel,* Written especially for those planning group educational tours, the 112-page compendium lists arts festivals, museums, dance, literary, musical, theatrical, and cinematic events and personalities. $12.00 from *American Friends of Melitz, 730 Broadway, New York, NY 10003.*

LEARN

Develop women's leadership in the Jewish student world. Participate in the first such international program involving networking, educational program ideas and a summer seminar in Israel. Contact: *The Women's Project at WUJS, P.O. Box 7914, Jerusalem 91077 Israel.*

From astrology to the Zohar, Mount Eden Shabbat Retreats offer opportunities to study with masters of esoteric Jewish studies using modalties of dance, music, lecture, art, ritual, humor, meditation and prayer. Epicurean vegetarian food is served in country-inn style accomodations for up to 14 people. *Restringing Dynamics, 688 Route 202 South, Flemington, NJ 08822.*

Feminist Jewish Women's Voices: Diversity and Community features Mindy Shapiro, Susan Talve, Francie Saposnik, Melanie Kaye/ Kantrowitz, Irena Klepfisz, Ellen Cannon, Evelyn Torton Beck, and Sauci Bosner on audiotape (#4) at a plenary session of the National Women's Study Association. Prepaid, $8.00 in the USA, $12.00 outside the USA. *NWSA, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742-1325.*

CREATE AND SHARE

To promote Jewish art and culture and become a resource and support system for new and established artists, we now have a new **organization for Jewish artists**. Among its long term goals: an institute for young artists, a summer concert; and a newsletter. *Jewish Artists Co-op, 13226 Otsego St, Sherman Oaks, CA 91423.*

Have you created an Orthodox Bat Mitzvah or Havdalah Service? Please contact *Lenore K. Stamm, 391 Links Drive East, Oceanside, NY 11572.*

Feminist International Radio Endeavor (FIRE) has recently begun broadcasting, in a magazine format, one hour daily, from a short-wave radio station located in Costa Rica. They ask requesting women to send tapes, 25 or 50 minutes maximum, which demonstrate a woman's perspective on any issue from sexuality to agriculture, from politics to medicine, education to demilitarization. Write for producers' guidelines to: *WINGS, P.O. Box 5307, Kansas City, MO 64131.*

BODY/POLITIC

"The natural history of HIV/AIDS in women can best be summarized by the

phrase 'late detection, early death'... Now that the pervasiveness and reality of HIV/AIDS among women is beginning to be explored, we are faced with an economic crisis that dictates the need to establish priorities." Be informed by a work in progress, *Searching for Women: A Literature Review on Women, HIVand AIDS in the United States*, second edition, May 1991, 118 pages, $10.50 from *The Multicultural AIDS Coalition, 566 Columbus Avenue, Boston, MA 02118.*

Join a *bikur cholim* society. *Bikur cholim* groups visit and give compassionate care to the sick, frail and elderly. The third edition of *The Directory of Bikur Cholim Resources* ($5.00) lists contact persons for *bikur cholim* societies associated with synagogues throughout the New York Metropolitan region, as well as other parts of North America. A collection of poems, prayers and inspirational thoughts, *Twice Chai: A Jewish Road to Recovery* by Marcia Glaubman Hain ($12.50) is also available from the *Coordinating Council on* Bikur Cholim, *130 East 59th Street, #306, New York, NY 10022.*

Know how they vote. For a free copy of the voting record of elected officials on an array of foreign and domestic policy issues: *Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, 2027 Mass. Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036.*

The Israel Union For Environment Defense, UED is a new non-profit public interest law group which offers free legal representation to Israeli citizens and grass roots environmental groups to combat pollution problems of public significance. They are also working to develop a cadre of environmental professionals. For more information: *American Friends of the Israel Union for Environmental Defense, 5000 West Esplanade Street, #203, Metairie, LA 70006.*

Strengthening Democracy is a comprehensive guide to Israel's social change movement, and lists many projects, such as this Russian-language brochure

published in Israel by SHILO Pregnancy Advisory Service addressing Soviet immigrants' lack of knowledge about contraception. $7.50 U.S., $8.50 Canadian. *New Israel Fund, P.0.Box 91588, Washington DC 20090-1588.*

REMEMBER

Are you a survivor of the Holocaust? Do you have family or friends who survived that period or who perished? The Simon Weisenthal Center would appreciate your submission of pre-Holocaust photographs and the completion of a questionnaire for its Beit-Hashoah-Museum of Tolerance Photo Archives dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. Materials sent cannot be returned. For questionnaires and information contact *Adaire Klein, Coordinator of Library Archives, 9760 West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90035.*

Fill out a page of testimony. Before the information is lost forever, please join Yad Vashem: The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, in its attempt to commemorate and record the names and biographical details of Jews who perished in the Holocaust. To date, nearly 3,000,000 names have been recorded, with many new names being submitted by recent Soviet *olim.* Forms are available in several languages, to be completed and mailed back for safekeeping. Please ask relatives, friends and neighbors to join in this monumental task. Contact: *Yad Vashem, POB 3477, Jerusalem, 91034 Israel.*

Learn the fate of family and friends who were victims of the Nazis. Following the post-glasnost receipt of 400,000 names of people who died or were interned in Auschwitz and other concentration camps, a new resource has been established by the American Red Cross in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, other national Red Cross Societies, and the Magen David Adom in Israel. Those wishing to inquire are advised that the search for information can still take a long time. You may contact your local chapter of the American Red Cross or call The Holocaust and War Victims Tracing and Information Center Hotline, *1-800-848-9277.*

Archives uniting **Jewish historical societies** in Tuscon, Phoenix, San Diego, Albuquerque and El Paso contain documents, photos and oral histories portraying Jewish life in the Southwest, including the lives of descendants of Jews and conversos who fled from the Spanish Inquisition. (SeeWinter 1991 cover story, "The Secret Lives of New Mexico's Indian Catholic Jews.") Much of the print material has been transfered to computer disks for easy research access. Contact: *Bloom Southwest Jewish Archives, University of Arizona, 1052 N. Highland Ave., Tucson, AZ 85721.*

Get a copy of the captain's passenger log from the boat your immigrant ancestors arrived on. Supply the port of arrival (New York, in the case of Ellis Island), an accurate spelling of the immigrant's name, approximate age and year of arrival. Learn the circumstances of the voyage to America, including port and date of embarkation, name of the boat, length of the voyage, and date of arrival, last place of residence in the old country, intended place of residence in America, including name and address of any relative or friend with whom the immigrant planned to live, marital status, age, occupation, literacy level and physical condition. Upon completion of a successful search–which depends on the accuracy and completeness of the information in your request–there is a $5.00 fee for record–copying and handling costs–payable to theNational Archives in Washington, DC. To request a search, call between 1 and 4 PM, Wednesday to Friday, *International Institute of New Jersey, 201-653-3888.*

GIVE TZEDAKA

Help child victims of sexual abuse by making a contribution to Gal -Ar, founded in 1989 by Esther Mor Horowitz, and the first organization established in Israel specifically to address this issue. Contributions may be sent to: *Gal Ar, 11 Veidat Katovitz Street, Tel Aviv, 62301 Israel.*

Letter from Natasha by Floreva G. Cohen, with illustrations by Hyman J. Campeas, tells the story of Operation Exodus to very young children and explains how they and their families can fill a tzedakah box to contribute to this historic rescue of Soviet Jews. Free, from *Susan Rachlin, Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, 426 West 58th Street, New York, NY 10019.*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

AND VASHTI REFUSED

A GAY MAN FINDS A BIBLICAL ROLE MODEL

by Gary David Comstock

It was always a source of disappointment for me that I was not able to find a role model for myself in the Bible. As a gay man, I have scoured and looked between the lines for someone whose story has a special meaning for me, whose situation addresses my own.

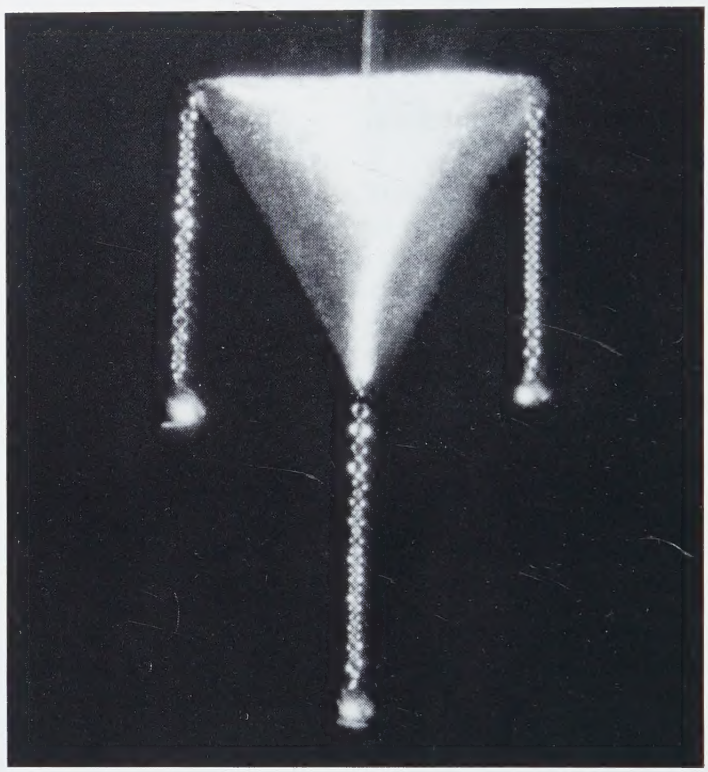
Since the Bible has meant a great deal to me, I particularly wanted to find a personal, empowering connection to it. It's not that certain stories are not of great value to me (for example, the Exodus story, or the many prophets' calls for justice), it's rather that among the wide range of experiences depicted in the Bible, my particular dreams and needs are not included.

As a Protestant university chaplain and professor of religion, I have been part of that apologetic scholarship which has worked hard to find hidden messages of suppressed voices that might speak to me. I have argued, for example, that the sin of Sodom wasn't really homosexuality (but inhospitality or gang rape); I have favored a homoerotic reading of the stories of David and Jonathan and of Naomi and Ruth; and I have found a graceful, nurturing, friendly sexuality expressed in *The Song of Songs*.

But more and more I am convinced that to read these stories—which after all revolve around the concerns and control of powerful heterosexual men and those who serve them—without criticism or protest, is to allow myself to be flattened by them. Wanting to find approval within that huge document has often overshadowed for me the numbing and painful impact of being excluded from it.

Finally I am facing the fact that my link to Scripture is precisely in my *exclusion* from it, not in my bending the material so that it fits me. The link is in coming to terms with that exclusion.

And yet, I find that link *in* the Bible. There *is* someone, a minor, minor character, mentioned ever so briefly, to whom I feel connected, and about whom I get excited: Queen Vashti, from the *Book of Esther*. Though her role in the story is a quick one (she disappears from the action after she refuses to obey her husband's order to show off her beauty to his drunken, ogling friends), and though she is replaced by the compliant, dutiful Queen Esther (of whom the authors of the book approve), she cuts a powerful figure, causing significant patriarchal panic.



"Esther/Vashti," a limited-edition body ornament that looks like a hamantasch and makes noise like a gragger (it has 12 small beads inside). Made by Ita Aber, it can be ordered in sterling or gold plated sterling. For information call 1-914-968-4873.

Her disregard for the King's orders, claim His Majesty's ministers, have serious implications for the entire social order. "This deed of the Queen will become known to all women," they report, "causing them to look with contempt upon their husbands." An official proclamation goes out across the land: All women must obey their husbands.

So what is the good news here?

First, it is in the fact that someone, in this case Vashti, goes against the normal flow of events at all. More to the point, the good news is not so much in the story itself, but in our response to it—that some of us are willing to rescue those who are punished or silenced for the sin of acting like whole, independent human beings rather than obedient, non-thinking non-persons.

The good news is in our looking critically at (rather than automatically accepting as authoritative) the Biblical document, or, to extrapolate, in our looking critically at the situations in which we find ourselves, or into which we were born. Amidst the normal flow of events and under the pressure of that which is taken for granted, the good news is in saying, "Hey, wait a minute, the aunt whom my family shunned—*she's* the one who saved my life;" or, in this case, "Vashti's refusal, not Esther's behind-the-scenes manipulations, *that's* what encourages me to assert who I am and what I need." The good news is that we find company, relief, and even salvation in embracing the oddities and refusals of those people who are normally dismissed, silenced or trivialized.

I am under no illusion about the purpose of Vashti's story as it appears in the *Book of Esther*. It is meant to frighten women. But it is our task, if we choose it, to insist instead that Vashti's was a righteous action and an unjust punishment. I would go even further and say that Vashti's story is an occasion to reconsider the priority given to the various Biblical stories that we inherit. Just as there came a time in my personal life when I realized that those role-

(Continued on page 26)